The Seventh-Day Adventist Church Philosophy of Education: A Panacea for Africa's Transformation.

By

Moses Onyendu Okai, Ph.D
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
Rivers State University
Port Marcourt, Nigeria.
+2347065763202
moses.okai@ust.edu.ng

Abstract

Education is reputed as the vehicle that drives human and material transformation. In achieving this outstanding goal of education, various organizations and nations of the world (Africa in particular) have formulated diverse policies and philosophies to promote its effectiveness. They have applied several theories such as functionalist and conflict theories of education to promote its efficiencies. It is however, the general belief that the efforts and resources invested in education are yet to yield the desired results. There is therefore the need for a paradigm shift in the philosophy of education. Using historical and comparative methods, this paper examines the efficacy of Seventh-day Adventist Church philosophy of education in the transformation of humanity. It re-establishes that the philosophy of education, called 'wholistic education', is one that involves an all-round simultaneous development of the learner to become responsible, rational, productive, self-reliant and God-fearing. The paper further affirms that Adventist education imparts more than academic knowledge in that it fosters a balanced development of the whole person - spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially. The paper concludes by recommending to all stakeholders of education in Africa to adopt the Seventh-day Adventist church philosophy of education since it seeks to transform humanity.,

Key words: Seventh-day Adventist Church, Philosophy of Education, Wholistic Education, Africa's Transformation.

Introduction

Education holds a strategic position in every society. Hence all youth must pass through some type of educational experience to prepare them to fill society's responsible positions. Therefore the role of education as an agent or instrument of transformation and social development cannot be over emphasized. Transformation may take place when humans need change. When the existing social system or network of social institutions fails to meet the existing human needs and when new materials suggest better ways of meeting human needs. Education is seen as a major vector in society, but that it is largely allocated a conservative role, since its main function is in the socialization of the young and the maintenance of the social order.

During times of rapid social change, such as the second half of the 20th century, the role of education in the service of the nation is emphasized. When things are going well, especially economically, more experimentation with education is supported, and more idealistic goals are pursued, such as equity of educational opportunity. It is in the ideological and moral spheres, however, that education is most clearly expected to play a leading role. Transformation takes place as a response to many types of changes that take place in the social and nonsocial environment. Education can initiate transformation by bringing about a change in outlook and attitude of man. It can bring about a change in the pattern of social relationships and thereby it may cause social changes. It is based on this that this paper examines the relationship between the unique nature of Seventh-day Adventist Church Philosophy of Education and its implications on Africa's transformation.

Conceptual Clarification

1. **Seventh-day Adventist Church**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a Millennialist Protestant Christian denomination that was founded in the 1860s in the United State of America. The name Seventh-day Adventist is based on the Church's observance of the "biblical Sabbath" on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. "Advent" means *coming* and refers to their belief that Jesus Christ will soon return to this earth.

Seventh-day Adventists differ in only four areas of beliefs from the mainstream Trinitarian Christian denominations. These are the Sabbath day, the doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary, the status of the writings of Ellen White, and their doctrine of the second coming and millennium. Adventists live modest lives, with a strict code of ethics. Missionary work is very important to the Church and all Adventists believe they have a duty to share their beliefs with others. The Church is heavily involved in education with almost 9,000 schools around the world and over 200 colleges and universities.

2. **Philosophy of Education**

A philosophy of education represents answers to questions about the purpose of schooling, a teacher's role, and what should be taught and by what methods. According Okai (2014), philosophy of education "is the philosophical reflection on the nature, aims, and problems of education" (34). For Omeonu (2013), "philosophy of education is the application of philosophical ideas to educational problems"(89). Such application of philosophical ideas, Ogunji (2008) agrees must "require a clear understanding of the nature of man, his origin and destiny" (14). This is the reason why Organizations and government spend so much resources to create educational environments in which their basic beliefs, ideologies, and core values will be taught to enhance development and transformation.

3. **Transformation**

To transform something is to change or alter its form or appearance usually for the better. Transformation can be physical when we talk of changes that are easily seen and felt. For example, development in infrastructures like transport systems, power supply, housing systems and the likes are physical facilities that are sine qua non to healthy living in any society. Transformation is usually associated with positive changes but it can however be negative when what is required to be put into a process to yield the desired result is not put in place in the right quality or quantity.

Individuals are transformed physically through biological processes like nutrition, physical exercises, and their interactions with their environment. However, the most significant way to transform human beings is through education. Education equips its recipients with knowledge, understanding and a way of viewing the

world which transforms them to a state that is better than what they would be without it.

Transformation can also be social when talking about the improvements that have taken place in the realm of the way of life of a people, their social etiquettes, modes of dressing, food types and the like. It is individuals who have been positively transformed who can transform the society. It is from this perspective that it can conveniently be argued that education can transform a society. On the other hand, when one considers the fact that all the players in the education sector are also parts and parcel of the larger society, one can only be cautiously optimistic of using education as an instrument of transforming the larger society. If the larger society is corrupt, it is very unlikely that the education sector will be very different from the larger society.

4. **Wholistic Education**

Education is say to be a process, developmental, natural, by which the student is assisted to understand, accept and utilize his abilities capabilities, aptitudes interests, and attitudinal patterns in relation to his aspirations. Lending credence this, White (1945) says that education is the "Harmonious development of the physical, the mental and the spiritual power. It prepares the student for joy of service in the world and for wider service in the world to come"(34). This is referred to as the wholistic approach to education, qualitative education and functional education.

Indeed wholistic education is the one that leads to transformation. It is the education that is not a head full of knowledge (mental), but a heart full of love (spiritual), with ears open to listen (social), and hand willing to help (physical). Therefore, to get fully educated persons, we need wholistic education. Agreeing to this Nwangwa (2011) opines that:

> Wholistic Education is an educational philosophy which involves an all-round simultaneous development of the mental, social, spiritual, physical, moral, vocational and the aesthetic powers of the learner to produce responsible, rational, productive, self-reliant, and God-fearing citizens. (1)

This education is biblical and is buried in Christian philosophy of education which uses Jesus' childhood development – "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52) as its standard.

There are four key areas of wholistic education - mental, physical spiritual, and social. Which means that wholistic education must meet Jesus' growth formula, which is growth in:

1. Wisdom that is mental (education of the head)
2. Stature that is physical (education of the hand)
3. Favour with God that is Spiritual(education of the heart) and
4. Favour with Man this Social (education for human relationship)

Mental - Education of the Head

The head contains the brain and the sense organs. It is the centre of intellect, thought, logical reasoning, memory, understanding, and observation. Education of the head begins at birth with the identification of the child's immediate surroundings and individuals who are often around him. According to White (1945), "The brain should not be filled with common place matters and empty theories and mean philosophies that will make it dwarfed and enfeebled. As a safeguard against this degeneracy, a delight study of the Bible is very important"(34). Student must be trained to be thinkers and not ordinary reflector of the thoughts of others they must be creative, critical thinkers with problem solving skills.

So mental development, White (1976) contends is that: "Mental, Moral, and physical culture should be combined in order to have well-developed, well-balanced men and women" (181). Once the mind is given to God, the mental abilities will be excellent. So education of the head is working on the development of the mental faculties of the learners to enable them to grasp, assimilate and use facts, figures, processes and systems in the pursuit of academic fulfillment.

Mentally, the student is provided with instruction, opportunity, and modelling so as to:

1. Be equipped with a well-rounded, liberal arts education
2. Attain excellence in scholarship in the various subject areas

3. Think critically, from cause to effect
4. Study effectively
5. Be fit for usefulness in his future station, whether at college or in a vocation
6. Be able to articulate thoughts and persuade others
7. Understand world cultures
8. Exhibit technological knowledge

Physical - Education of the Hand

In light of the global unemployment virus, it is imperative to acquire vocational skills so that one can use their hand in fending for himself if employment is hard to come by. Education of the hand is physical, practice and vocational. It includes using the hands in doing something meaningful and beneficial, not just to write alone. It involves skills in agriculture, manufacturing, engineering, mechanics, home economics, fashion designing, tailoring, hair dressing etc.

Also various industrial attachment schemes like SIWES - Student Industrial Work-Experience Scheme, National Apprenticeship Scheme, are all designed to encourage vocational education. In fact entrepreneurship as a course should be taught from the first semester of student entry into the university. Also the student must be taught to practice healthful living which is reflected in what is known as "NEWSTART":

NEW START is a very effective way to work on your emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual health. NEW START also teaches that it is never too late or early to make a healthy change in your life. NEW START stands for:

1. **Nutrition:** Nutritionists recommend: 2-3 servings of fruit a day and 3-5 servings of vegetables a day. Whole Foods Plant-Based Diet: Evidence suggests a WFPB diet can not only prevent but treat coronary artery disease (CAD), the leading cause of death in the Africa in both men and women, and other illnesses. (https://findado.osteopathic.org/5-myths-of-whole-food-plant-based-diets-debunked)

2. **Exercise:** Exercise can help your mental and physical health become better. Among the many benefits of exercise, better mental health is crucial. Sometimes exercise can seem like another chore, and you may not have the motivation to add

it to your routine every day. What if our perspective to exercise sounds like playing with our children in the park, planting a garden in our backyard, taking our dog for a walk, and dancing to our best beats. Exercise can be fun, and the benefits include better sleep, better mood, better immunity from diseases, and much more!

3. **Water**: Some of the benefits of having sufficient hydration every day include carrying nutrients and oxygen to your cells; Flushing bacteria from your bladder; Aiding digestion; Preventing constipation; Normalizing blood pressure; Stabilizing the heartbeat; and Cushioning joints. How much water do we need a day? Experts recommend as follows:

Age	**Daily Adequate Intake**
1-3 years	4 cups, or 32 ounces
4-8 years	5 cups, or 32 ounces
9-13 years	7-8 cups, or 56-64 ounces
14-18 years	8-11 cups, or 64-88 ounces
Men, 19 and older	13 cups, or 104 ounces
Women, 19 and older	9 cups, or 72 ounces
Pregnant Women	10 cups, or 80 ounces
Breastfeeding Women	13 cups, or 104 ounces

4. **Sunlight:** Researchers have estimated the duration of solar radiation exposure required to obtain the recommended doses of vitamin D. While in spring and summer 10 to 20 minutes in the sun are enough, in the winter months almost two hours would be needed, therefore for much of the population it is difficult to achieve the optimal values.

5. Temperance: The American educator and temperance reformer Frances E Willard said "Temperance is moderation in the things that are good and total abstinence from the things that are foul." Self-control is the willpower to say no to unhealthy choices and habits. We can establish healthy neural pathways in the brain by creating healthy habits and positive addictions.

6. **Air**; Most living things need oxygen to survive. The quality of air that we breathe is imperative for the healthy functioning of the organs in our

body.(https://www.sweg onairacademy.com/good-ventilation/why-and-when-to-ventilate/basic-need-for- fresh-air/)

7. **Rest**: Sleep expert Matthew Walker states that healthy sleep is determined by the quality, quantity, regularity, and timing of the sleep. Sleep hygiene is setting a conducive environment for sleeping in the night. Good sleep hygiene constitutes a consistent sleep schedule, following a bedtime routine, forming healthy habits, and optimizing your bedroom for sleep. (https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene). In essence, the quality and consistency of our sleep plays a huge role in our physical and mental health.

8. **Trust in Divine Power**: "Faith and mental health are not antithetical to each other; in fact, they are complementary. After all, if mental health is health, that includes our whole health - our physical health, our mental health, and our spiritual health. Faith can help us in many ways that traditional treatments can't. Of the 93 observational studies, two-thirds found lower rates of depressive disorder with fewer depressive symptoms in persons who were more religious. In 34 studies that did not find a similar relationship, only 4 found that being religious was associated with more depression. Of 22 longitudinal studies, 15 found that greater religiousness predicted mild symptoms and faster remission (https://www. psychiatrictimes.com/view/ religion-spirituality-and-mental-health)

In summary, if you or someone that you know is having a hard time coping with life stressors and anxiety, know that help is there. NEWSTART is a simple acronym that lays the foundation for a wholesome lifestyle.

Education of the hand is developing the physical capabilities by consciously exposing the learners to the different physical activities that will not only help them to be useful to themselves but also help them to maintain optimum physical health. Physically, the student is provided with instructions, opportunities and modelling so as to:

1. Maintain a healthy and fit body
2. Use his hands to labour
3. Treat his body as the temple of the Holy Spirit

4. Be well groomed and modest in presentation
5. Disciplined in healthy life-habits
6. Remain sexually pure according to biblical standards

Spiritual - Education of the Heart

The heart in this context is the totality of a person's ability. It controls feeling, emotions, sympathy, affection, courage and enthusiasm, education of the heart involves spiritual growth in the fear of the Lord. For the Bible says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom" (Proverb 1:7) In fact, education without God is crises; education without the fear of God makes one a clever devil. An intellectual giant should not be a moral dwarf. This make moral education relevant. Without morals a lawyer becomes liar, an accountant becomes a foster, a teacher becomes a cheater, and a Doctor become dangerous.

The most important part of man that need serious education is the heart more that the brain. Spiritual wellbeing is a medicine to sick person so our education depends solely on God because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Education of the heart is restoring men and women to the image of their maker by leading them to accept the moral values and norms stated in the word of God as the standard of faith and practice, and to submit themselves to divine will and grace through which they can grow as true and trust-worthy citizens.

Spiritually, the student is provided with instructions, opportunities, and modelling in:

1. Loving God,
2. Loving his neighbour
3. Developing a prayer life even in classrooms
4. Rightly dividing the word of God
5. Reasoning from the principles of God's Word to all of life
6. Owning and articulating a Biblical Christian world view
7. Walking in purity of thought and action
8. To know that the focus of education is to restore God's image in man.

Social – Education for Human Relationship

We are created as social beings. This is why we live with family, neighbours and members of society; loneliness can lead to mental illness, and many economic,

political, and religious advantage will elude such a person. We are encouraged to associate with persons for positive reasons. Education of the social life is helping learners to develop healthy social relationships that will prepare them to take a right place in their society and be agents of social adjustment and service to their fellow men and women.

Socially, the student is provided with instructions, opportunities and modelling so as to promote:

1. The Fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22).
2. Modesty
3. Tact in dealing with others
4. Civility and good manners
5. Respectfulness, compassion, and helpfulness toward others
6. Honouring of father and mother and others in authority
7. The biblical view that marriage is between one man and one woman and is sacred
8. Global awareness in view of the world
9. Sensitivity to cultural and ethnic diversity
10. Patriotism and good citizenship

An ideal wholistic education to be achieved by adopt Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education.

Seventh-day Adventist Church Philosophy of Education.

The Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education is Christ-centered. Adventists believe that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's character and purposes can be understood as revealed in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, and in nature. The distinctive characteristics of Adventist education—derived from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White—point to the redemptive aim of true education: to restore human beings into the image of their Maker.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God is infinitely loving, wise, and powerful. He relates to human beings on a personal level, presenting His character as the ultimate norm for human conduct and His grace as the means of restoration.

Adventists recognize, however, that human motives, thinking, and behaviour have fallen short of God's ideal. Education in its broadest sense is a means of restoring human beings to their original relationship with God. Working together, homes, schools, and churches cooperate with divine agencies in preparing learners for responsible citizenship in this world and in the world to come.

Adventist education imparts more than academic knowledge. It fosters a balanced development of the whole person—spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially. Its time dimensions span eternity. It seeks to develop a life of faith in God and respect for the dignity of all human beings; to build character akin to that of the Creator; to nurture thinkers rather than mere reflectors of others' thoughts; to promote loving service rather than selfish ambition; to ensure maximum development of each individual's potential; and to embrace all that is true, good, and beautiful.

Within the perspective of the Adventist philosophy of education the student completing his education should:

1. Gives preference to careers that directly support the mission of the Church.
2. Recognizes the importance of the quest for truth in all its dimensions as it affects the total development of the individual in relation both to God and to fellow human beings.
3. Utilizes available resources such as revelation, reason, reflection, and research to discover truth and its implications for human life here and in the hereafter, while recognizing the limitations inherent in all human endeavours.
4. Leads students to develop lives of integrity based upon principles compatible with the religious, ethical, social, and service values essential to the Adventist worldview.
5. Fosters—particularly at the graduate level—the mastery, critical evaluation, discovery and dissemination of knowledge, and the nurture of wisdom in a community of scholars.

Indeed Adventist philosophy of education emphasis is on curriculum that will promote academic excellence and will include a core of general studies needed for responsible citizenship in a given culture along with spiritual insights that inform

Christian living and build community. Such citizenship includes appreciation for the Christian heritage, concern for social justice, and stewardship of the environment. For Adventist, balanced curriculum will address the major developmental needs in the spiritual, intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and vocational realms. All areas of study will be examined from the perspective of the biblical worldview within the context of the Great Controversy theme, as it promotes the integration of faith and learning.

Seventh-day Adventist Church Philosophy of Education and Africa's Transformation.

It is worthy to note that the Seventh-day Adventist church owned and operates over four hundred (400) secondary schools, and twenty eight (28) universities and colleges in Africa. The impact of transformation derived from these schools can only be measured by some encouraging comments received from most African political leaders. They have in various times expressed their gratitude for the transforming nature of the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education in Africa. Examples of these leaders are and not limited to;

Former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo commended Babcock University (Adventist University in Nigeria) for making marks among private universities in Nigeria. According to Obasanjo Adventist education is dedicated to character building and moral values which other universities tend to ignore. https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2009-06-09/nigerias-adventist-university-commended-for-exemplary-educational-standards/)

President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, while speaking at a fundraising event for the Adventist University building in Rongai, Kenya, said he was grateful for the church's work in many education and health institutions across the country. Turning his attention to the Adventist University of Africa, Kenya, he expressed appreciation for the fact that the university stands alone among the country's 22 public universities and 37 private universities in its strong focus on post-graduate studies. In his word he said "You have established hospitals, educational facilities, and other socially beneficial amenities. You have uplifted communities, empowered our citizens, and built our nation"

(http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story2343-kenya%E2%80%99s-president-says-adventist-church-is-transforming-country)

The Rwandan Prime Minister Anastase Murekesi also praised the church at the grand opening of a $2.4 million state-of-the-art facility that is expected to turn the Adventist University of Central Africa into a leading provider of IT and communication specialists for the region. ((http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story2290-adventist-university-goes-hi-tech-to-kudos-from-rwanda's-premier) In fact, several African countries are looking up to Adventist education to raise their living of standards.

The reason for this unprecedented attachment to Adventist philosophy of education by Africans is the transformational values it offers. It is a value-based education. These values include:

1. **Character Building for Eternity:** One of the primary aims within Adventist school system is that students are helped to develop strength of character and hold sound Christian principles. Students will experience activities and lessons through programs and opportunities that are designed to teach the value of life and respect for others and themselves.
2. **Development of Leaders**: students are offered the opportunity to participate in several programs which offer involvement in the local community and provide students with life-changing experiences. Adventist schools also present students with many opportunities to develop an understanding for the needs of others through classroom projects for various charities, visits to neighbouring nursing homes and several other programs. From these programs students will learn leadership skills that inspire others into action through enthusiasm and a positive approach to life.
3. **Building an Understanding**: The student bodies in all of our schools are made up from a diversity of backgrounds. And, although Adventist education system is based on the Christian principles of the Bible, they teach respect for other cultures and faiths, embracing the colourful mix within their school communities. Through these programme the students will develop meaningful friendships and share experiences that will develop their character.

4. **Fostering of Values**: Using a focused Bible teaching and developing a relationship with Jesus, Adventist schools are able to help students foster the values that will shape their character as an adult. This values include: love, integrity, hard work, commitment, contentment, goodness, diligence and faithfulness. In fact, the values taught within the Adventist education system will help students develop a compassionate, caring nature with strong values and wisdom.
5 **Teachers-Students Relationship**: Teaching involves relationship. The teacher-student relationship is based in Christian love and is crowned with mutual respect. The teacher is seen as a living curriculum before his students. Through examples within the Adventist education system teachers the students learn wise decision-making, respect for and acceptance of others, cooperation, willingness to meet new challenges, desire to help those in need, value for oneself and the desire to learn.

Conclusion

The paper discovers that the goal of Seventh-day Adventist Church philosophy of education is to guide students towards an understanding that God is at the center of every pursuit of knowledge. Not only that, Adventist philosophy of education also strive to challenge students towards allowing God to mold their hearts in submission to Him, and in doing that, they equip them to be the hands and minds of transforming the world and Africa in particular. There is no greater purpose for a school than to guide students towards embracing this world and the world to come. To realize this goal, the paper recommends to all stakeholders of education in Africa to adopt the Seventh-day Adventist Church philosophy of education.

References

http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story2290-adventist-university-goes-hi-tech-to-kudos-fromrwanda's-premer. Retrieved: June 24, 2025

https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2009-06-09/nigerias-adventist-university-commended-for-exemplary-educational-standards/. Retrieved: March 29, 2025

http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story2343-kenya%E2%80%99s-president-says-adventist-church-is-transforming-country. Retrieved: January 26, 2026

http://www.aiias.edu/publicatios/SDA%20Philosophy%20of20Education.pdf. Retrieved: February 24, 2025

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/volunteertn/documents/tcvsl/tcvsl21-workshops/New% 20Start%20and%20Taking%20Care%20of%20Ourselves.pdf Retrieved: March 29, 2025

Nwangwa, Kanelechi K. C. (2011) *Wholistic Educational Administration Practices*. Aba: Okman Prints, 2011.

Ogunji James A. *Understanding Philosophy of Education: From a Christian Perspective*. Ilishan-Remo: Babcock University press, 2008.

Okai, Moses O.(2014) *The Pivot of Christian Philosophy of Education*. Ahoada: Magjoe Company,

Omeonu, Chimezie A., Ademola S Tayo, and Joshua M. A. Oyinloye. (2013) *Introduction to Philosophy of Christian Education*. Ikenne-Remo: G. Olarotayo Printers,

The Holy Bible

White, Ellen G.(1976) *Counsel on Health.* Mountain View, Cliff: Pacific Press Publishing Association, .

_____ (1945) *Education*. Mountain View, Cliff: Pacific Press Publishing Association,