

Nigerian Philosophy of Education: An Appraisal

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Abstract

Nigerian philosophy of education is a complex and evolving field that reflects the country's rich history, diverse cultures, and ever-changing needs. Drawing upon the historical context of the Nigerian educational system, this study provides an overview of the fundamental principles, core values, and cultural influences that shape Nigerian educational philosophy and its relevance in the modern world. Among these principles are the importance of education for individual and national development, the need to promote national unity and cultural diversity, and the importance of providing quality education for all individuals. Through careful analysis, the study appraises how the Nigerian Philosophy of education addresses contemporary challenges and prepares students for the future. It discusses the need for adjustments and adaptations in light of evolving societal needs and global trends. The study includes case studies and examples highlighting successful implementations of Nigerian educational philosophy. By reflecting on its strengths and potential areas for improvement, this study offers insights into future directions and potential research areas for further exploration.

Keywords: Education, Philosophy, Nigerian Philosophy of Education, Cultural Heritage, Teaching Methodologies, Indigenous Education

Introduction

Nigeria is a country with a rich history and diverse cultures. This diversity is reflected in its educational system, shaped by various philosophical traditions. The Nigerian philosophy of education is a complex and evolving field influenced by traditional African values, Western education, and the country's unique social economic, and political contexts. It plays an essential role in shaping the country's educational system, one of whose fundamental principles is the transformative power of education for individuals and national development. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN (2014), education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of society.

Generally, education is a broad term encompassing a wide range of activities and experiences that aim to facilitate learning and development. It can occur in formal settings, such as schools and universities, or informal settings such as the home and community. Education is a lifelong pursuit (Mandela, 2004). It is not confined to a specific period of life or limited to the boundaries of formal educational institutions. Instead, it must be a continued aspiration by individuals as in it is the ability to continuously develop knowledge, skills, and opportunities for personal and professional development in the long run. It transforms the individual into a sound and functional citizen who will contribute meaningfully towards nation building (Okpara, 2022).

In Nigeria, education does not only promote individual and national development, but it also has the ability to enhance national unity and embrace cultural diversity. According to Ukeje (2009), as a product, education has the ability to change behaviour, and as a discipline, education is the body of organized knowledge. Therefore, education embraces all forms of training: formal and informal, non-formal and indigenous, it inculcates the right upbringing in the going. This essentially states that education helps people to develop the values and attitudes that are necessary for living a good life. These values include respect, responsibility, and compassion which promote national unity and allow the embracement of cultural diversity.

While rooted in tradition, the Nigerian philosophy of education also recognizes the need to adapt and respond to the changing needs of society. In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed rapid advancements in technology, globalization, and shifting economic and social landscapes, posing new challenges and

opportunities for education. As such, it is imperative to critically evaluate the role of Nigerian educational philosophy in addressing these contemporary challenges and preparing students for the modern world.

This study aims to drive into the multifaceted nature of the Nigerian philosophy of education, examining its historical foundations, core principles, and cultural influences. Through critical analysis, it seeks to assess how the philosophy addresses contemporary challenges. By exploring successful implementations of Nigerian educational philosophy through case studies and examples, this study aims to provide valuable insights into its strengths and potential areas for adjustments. Ultimately, this examination of the Nigerian philosophy of education will contribute to the ongoing dialogue on educational reform and offer guidance for future directions and research areas in Nigeria and beyond.

Historical Context

The history of the Nigerian philosophy of education can be traced back to the pre-colonial era when traditional African societies placed a high value on education. In these societies, education was seen as a means of transmitting cultural values, preparing young people for adulthood, and developing their skills and abilities. Traditional education was typically informal and experiential. It took place in the home, the community, and the workplace. Children learn by observing and participating in the activities of their elders. They learned about the history and culture of their people, the skills they will need to survive and thrive, and the values that would guide their behaviour.

Long after in the pre-colonial era, the formal education of the West also came into place. Nwafor (2016) states that the Nigerian education system, especially formal education has come a long way, if we go down memory lane, it was first introduced by the Portuguese Catholic missionaries in the palace of Oba of Benin and Olu of Warri respectively in the 16th century. The Portuguese missionaries, driven by their religious missions, established schools and educational institutions to propagate Christianity and spread European knowledge. They aimed to convert the local population to Christianity while imparting basic literacy skills and religious teachings.

However, it later became apparent that the education system brought by the Portuguese missionaries was not the best for Nigerians. It was not only incompatible with traditional African values, but it also did not carry all the Nigerians along. While the southern part focused on the education by the missionaries, the Northern people focused on their Islamic education. There is quite a bit of division among Nigerians from different tribes. With this being present, the British government then brought their own education system which could be accepted by the entire populace and also prepare the country for independence. However, the tribal movement of the people did not make the foundation of this strong enough. The civil war took place between 1967-1970.

In 1969, there was a need to reorientate the minds of all Nigerians through education. Hence, the National Curriculum Conference was held and resulted in the National Policy on Education (Okparaugo, 2021). This marked a new beginning in the Nigerian educational system. It aimed to provide a comprehensive framework that would guide the development and implementation of education policies across the country. The policy emphasized the need for a balanced and integrated curriculum that would incorporate both Nigerian and universal values and promote national unity and cultural diversity. This policy has been changed from time to time from 1969, 1979, 1981, and so on.

Today, the educational system in Nigeria continues to undergo significant developments and reforms as the government continues to oversee its success with exemplary implementations. The National Policy on Education serves as the foundation for educational practices and policies in the country. It emphasizes the importance of providing quality education for all Nigerians, irrespective of their social or economic background. Efforts have been made to improve access to education, particularly in underserved areas, through the establishment of more schools and the provision of scholarships and incentives to encourage enrollment.

The Nigerian educational system is structured into different levels, including early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education. The government has prioritized the expansion of access to education at all levels, aiming to increase enrollment rates and ensure that children have the opportunity to receive a quality education. Furthermore, the government has implemented various initiatives to enhance the quality of education, such as curriculum reviews, teacher training programs, and technology integration in classrooms.

However, despite these efforts, challenges persist in the Nigerian educational system. Limited infrastructure, inadequate funding, and a shortage of qualified teachers continue to hinder the delivery of quality education. Educational disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as among different socio-economic groups, remain a concern. Additionally, there is a need to align the curriculum with the demands of the modern world, including the incorporation of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and the promotion of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of entrepreneurship education and vocational training in preparing students for the workforce. Efforts have been made to promote skills development and provide opportunities for practical learning and hands-on experiences. This reflects a shift towards a more holistic approach to education that acknowledges the importance of both academic knowledge and practical skills.

Nigerian Philosophy of Education: What is it?

To truly understand the Nigerian philosophy of education, it is crucial first to understand the concept of philosophy itself. There are many different definitions of philosophy, but one that is particularly relevant to the Nigerian philosophy of education is that "philosophy is the quest for wisdom". According to Akinsanya (2010), philosophy could be prudently defined or described if we take recourse into history to identify what philosophers have preoccupied themselves with in the past and in the present days. He stated succinctly that philosophers have preoccupied themselves with: pursuit of wisdom, speculations, critical activities, prescriptions, critique of ideologies, conceptual analysis, and investigation of the theoretical foundation of other disciplines.

The most significant objective we can deduce from the above is "wisdom." Okpara (2022) described education as the transmission of worthwhile knowledge. This transmission of worthwhile knowledge can only take place when individuals actively engage in the pursuit of wisdom within a chosen field. As Singh (2007) aptly stated, "The belief that men may educate without concerning themselves with Philosophy means failure to understand the precise nature of education. The process of education cannot go on right without the help of philosophy." This lends credence to the idea of philosophy of education as the application of philosophical principles in dealing with the issues of education. This profound insight underscores the indispensable role of philosophy in education and highlights the vital need for educators, policymakers, and learners to embrace philosophical inquiry as a foundational element of the Nigerian philosophy of education. By integrating philosophy into educational practices, Nigeria can cultivate a transformative educational landscape that nurtures critical thinking, fosters intellectual growth, and empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the broader society.

Nigerian philosophy of education seeks to achieve the following: building a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; great and dynamic economy; and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 2014). From the start, the Nigerian philosophy of education has been guided by a set of fundamental principles and beliefs that shape its educational practices and goals. It is through these philosophical conceptions and insights that goals are formulated (Ezeanolue et al, 2021). The fundamental principles of the Nigerian philosophy of education include the belief that;

1. Education is essential for individuals and national development. This means that education is seen as a tool for improving the lives of individuals and building a strong and prosperous nation.

2. All children have the right to an education, regardless of their social and economic background. This means that education should be accessible to everyone regardless of family income and social status.
3. Education should be relevant to the needs of individuals and society. This means that the curriculum should be designed to meet the needs of the people and to help them develop the skills that they need to be successful in life.
4. Education should promote democracy and good citizenship. This means that education should teach students about the importance of democracy and how to be good citizens.
5. Lifelong learning is important for everyone. This means that education should not be seen as something that only happens in school. It should be a lifelong process of learning and growing.
6. Education should reflect the diversity of the Nigerian society. This means that the curriculum should include content that is relevant to the different cultures and ethnic groups that make up Nigeria.
7. Education should be equally accessible to boys and girls. This means that the education system should be designed to ensure that girls have the same opportunities as boys to get an education.

To discuss further, the core values, cultural influences, and indigenous knowledge systems inform the Nigerian philosophy of education. Nigeria is a country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its distinct cultural practices, languages, and values (Olayiwola, 2021). The philosophy of education in Nigeria embraces this diversity and seeks to incorporate the cultural perspectives, histories, and traditions of different ethnic groups into the educational curriculum. By doing so, it acknowledges the importance of cultural identity, fosters cultural pride, and promotes a sense of belonging among students.

Cultural influences play a significant role in shaping the Nigerian Philosophy of Education. Traditional Nigerian societies have long recognized the importance of education in transmitting cultural knowledge, values, and skills from one generation to another. Indigenous knowledge systems, which encompass traditional practices, beliefs, and wisdom, form an integral part of the Nigerian Philosophy of Education. These systems encompass a wide range of knowledge in areas such as agriculture, craftsmanship, medicine, music, and storytelling, among others. The Nigerian Philosophy of Education acknowledges the value of indigenous knowledge and seeks to integrate it into the educational curriculum, recognizing its relevance, authenticity, and contribution to sustainable development. By incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, education in Nigeria bridges the gap between formal education and traditional wisdom, providing a holistic and culturally grounded learning experience.

The Nigerian Philosophy of Education also draws inspiration from the communal values and social norms that characterize Nigerian society. Community-oriented values such as cooperation, respect for elders, and social responsibility are deeply ingrained in the educational practices and goals of Nigeria. Education is seen as a collective endeavour that involves the active participation of the community, parents, teachers, and learners. This communal approach to education fosters a sense of shared responsibility for the educational well-being of society and emphasizes the importance of education in community development and nation-building. The Nigerian Philosophy of Education recognizes that education should not only benefit individuals but also contribute to the progress and upliftment of the broader society.

Incorporating core values, cultural influences, and indigenous knowledge systems into the Nigerian Philosophy of Education ensures that education is culturally relevant, empowering, and connected to the lived experiences of the Nigerian people. By honouring and integrating these aspects, Nigeria strives to create an educational system that preserves cultural heritage, fosters a sense of identity and belonging, and equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to thrive in a diverse and rapidly changing world.

Relevance of The Nigerian Philosophy of Education in the Modern World

The Nigerian philosophy of education holds very significant relevance in the modern world. It addresses challenges and prepares students for the continuous complexities of the modern world. The principles, as well as the objectives of the philosophy of education from the historical context till date, have been formulated with a deep understanding of the changing landscape and the needs of individuals and society. In today's rapidly changing world, characterized by technological advancements, globalization, and socio-economic shifts, the Nigerian philosophy of education provides a comprehensive framework that aligns with the demands and realities of the modern era.

As stated in the second national development plan (1970-1974) and as endorsed by the Nigerian philosophy of education, the goal is to develop an egalitarian society that is based on democratic principles, social justice, and equal opportunities for all (Ugwuanyi, 2014). This overarching aim continues to remain relevant as it directly addresses the challenges of inequality, social injustice, and the need for a well-rounded education in the present world, especially in the face of globalization and technological advancements.

One key aspect in which the Nigerian philosophy of education maintains its relevance is its emphasis on holistic development, which is the development of the individual's physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being (Udo, 2023). In a world where specialization is often prioritized, the philosophy promotes a balanced approach that nurtures both intellectual and moral growth. This is crucial in preparing students not only for professional careers but also for responsible citizenship and ethical decision-making. The philosophy's commitment to cultivating critical thinking, moral values, and cultural awareness equips students to navigate the complexities of the modern world with a broader perspective.

Furthermore, the Nigerian philosophy of education on communal and societal values remains pertinent in the globalized world (Ekeh, 2019). According to the study by Wahab, Odunsi, and Ajiboye (2012): Causes and consequences of rapid erosion of cultural values in a traditional African society, while modernization has brought about numerous benefits, it has also led to the erosion of traditional values and a sense of disconnect in many societies. The Nigerian philosophy of education has a focus on communal harmony, respect for elders, and the collective well-being of society offers a valuable counterbalance to individualistic tendencies that can arise in the modern age. This can contribute to building a more cohesive and culturally enriched society, fostering a sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

In terms of addressing contemporary challenges, the Nigerian philosophy of education recognizes the importance of adaptability and lifelong learning. Rapid technological advancements and the ever-evolving job market require individuals to continuously update their skills and knowledge. The philosophy's emphasis on flexible learning and skill acquisition aligns with the demands of a dynamic workforce, equipping students with the ability to embrace change and remain competitive in the job market. Also, the philosophy's recognition of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage is of great significance in today's world. As societies strive for development, there is a growing realization that preserving and integrating indigenous knowledge can lead to sustainable solutions in various fields such as agriculture, medicine, and environmental conservation.

Needs for Adjustment in the Nigerian Philosophy of Education

The Nigerian philosophy of education has been the bedrock upon which our educational system has been built. It has played a pivotal role in shaping the minds of generations, equipping them with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary to navigate the complexities of life. Yet, in this era defined by technological advancements, shifting social dynamics, and the globalization of information, we must pause and reflect on whether this philosophy requires adjustments to remain as relevant and effective as it has always been throughout history.

The dawn of the digital age has changed the way we interact with the people around us. The new generations of students in this age are especially the testifiers of this new dawn. Technology has become an integral part of our daily lives, reshaping how we communicate, access information and even learn (Haleem et al, 2022). Therefore, it stands to reason that our educational philosophy should encompass a more pronounced emphasis on digital literacy. The ability to navigate digital spaces, critically assess online information, and harness the power of technology for both personal and societal advancements has become a crucial skill. By incorporating digital literacy into our educational philosophy, we ensure that our students are not only academically equipped but also technologically empowered to succeed in today's digital world.

While our philosophy of education has championed the value of community and societal well-being, there is an opportunity to expand our understanding of community in a global context (Yakubu, 2020). The concept of the global community is more relevant than ever, given the interconnectedness of the present world. As borders blur and communication spans continents, developing a sense of global citizenship becomes imperative. We must consider infusing our educational philosophy with a greater emphasis on understanding global issues, promoting cultural exchange, and encouraging empathy for diverse perspectives. By nurturing a global perspective, we equip our students to become responsible global citizens who contribute meaningfully to global challenges and opportunities.

The principle of a well-rounded curriculum has served us well. It ensures that students receive a comprehensive education. However, in an age of diverse interests and personalized learning, there is room to explore the concept of tailoring education to individual needs. The rise of competency-based education and personalized learning pathways reflects a shift towards recognizing that every student's journey is unique. This approach allows students to explore their passions, talents, and strengths while still achieving core learning outcomes. By integrating personalized learning into our philosophy, we acknowledge the diverse ways in which students learn and thrive and this fosters a deeper engagement with education amongst all students.

As industries and job markets continue to evolve at an unprecedented pace, the ability to adapt and embrace lifelong learning is paramount (Dwivedi, 2021). Nigerian philosophy of education could be further enriched by placing a stronger emphasis on the importance of adaptability and continuous growth. Encouraging students to cultivate a mindset of lifelong learning prepares them not just for specific careers but for a lifetime of personal and professional development. In a world where knowledge is constantly expanding, an adaptable mindset equips individuals to stay relevant and succeed in an ever-changing world.

Furthermore, while we have acknowledged the value of indigenous knowledge systems, we could delve deeper into integrating these systems into our educational framework. Indigenous knowledge holds unique insights into sustainable practices, local wisdom, and cultural heritage. By weaving indigenous knowledge into our philosophy, we bridge the gap between tradition and innovation. This integration enables a sense of pride in cultural heritage, while also equipping students with the tools to address modern challenges through the lens of indigenous wisdom.

Lastly, considering the pressing environmental challenges our planet faces, Nigerian educational philosophy could incorporate discussions about sustainability and environmental consciousness (Bosah, 2013). Encouraging environmental responsibility and awareness from an early age can instill a sense of stewardship for our planet. By integrating sustainability education into our philosophy, we empower students to understand the impact of their actions on the environment and equip them to become advocates for a more sustainable future.

In essence, the Nigerian philosophy of education has been the cornerstone of our educational system, guiding generations toward holistic growth, cultural understanding, and societal values. However, the changing nature of the world beckons us to evaluate whether adjustments are necessary to align with the demands of the present and future. By integrating digital literacy, embracing global citizenship,

exploring personalized learning, emphasizing adaptability, weaving indigenous knowledge, and promoting environmental consciousness, we can ensure that our educational philosophy remains not only relevant but also transformative. This way, we're not only preparing students for success but also nurturing future leaders who will navigate the world with wisdom, compassion, and the capacity to effect positive change.

Case Studies and Examples of Nigerian Philosophy of Education in Display

These instances highlight the philosophy's influence on educational initiatives, institutions, and programs that embody its core values and principles.

Indigenous Knowledge Integration (1840): Some educational institutions have recognized the value of indigenous knowledge in addressing contemporary challenges. Initiatives that incorporate traditional agricultural practices, herbal medicine, and local environmental knowledge into the curriculum align with the philosophy's emphasis on holistic education and cultural authenticity. By integrating indigenous knowledge, these programs promote sustainable practices and preserve cultural heritage.

Technical and Vocational Education (1909): In response to the changing demands of the job market, technical and vocational education has gained prominence in Nigeria. Initiatives such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) focus on equipping individuals with practical skills and entrepreneurial knowledge. These initiatives align with the philosophy's emphasis on the relevance of education to individual and societal needs. By providing skills that lead to self-employment and contribute to economic growth, vocational education addresses contemporary challenges while upholding the philosophy's principles.

Unity Schools (1966): One of the most notable examples of the Nigerian Philosophy of Education in action is the network of Unity Schools. These schools were established with the aim of promoting national unity, fostering cultural diversity, and providing quality education across different regions of Nigeria. Unity Schools offers a balanced curriculum that encompasses both academic and cultural education. Students from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds interact and learn together, promoting social cohesion and understanding among different groups. These schools exemplify the philosophy's commitment to equality, diversity, and holistic education.

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) (May 22, 1973): The NYSC program is a unique embodiment of the Nigerian Philosophy of Education. Graduates from various universities and regions of Nigeria are required to participate in a one-year service program in a different part of the country. This initiative aims to promote national integration, understanding, and cultural exchange. By exposing young graduates to different parts of the country, the NYSC program fosters a sense of shared identity and promotes unity among diverse groups. It emphasizes the philosophy's emphasis on community, shared responsibility, and social harmony.

African Language Initiative (2002): Some educational institutions and organizations have taken steps to incorporate African languages and cultural studies into the curriculum. For example, Nnamdi Azikiwe University introduced African and Asian Studies department as well as Igbo language in General Studies, the University of Ibadan introduced the "Institute of African Studies" to promote research, teaching, and documentation of African languages, cultures, and traditions. These initiatives reflect the Nigerian Philosophy of Education's commitment to cultural heritage and the value of embracing indigenous knowledge systems. By recognizing the importance of local languages and cultures, these initiatives contribute to a more culturally inclusive educational environment.

Conclusion

In this study, the complex and evolving nature of the Nigerian philosophy of education is explored, delving into its historical roots, core principles, and cultural influences. This philosophy, deeply grounded in the country's history, diverse cultures, and changing needs, highlights education's transformative potential for both individual and national development, while also emphasizing the importance of national unity, cultural diversity, and integration of indigenous knowledge systems.

Through case studies and examples, the study illustrates practical applications of the philosophy, such as Unity Schools and technical education initiatives, showcasing how its principles are embedded in educational programs. While the philosophy remains relevant, the study suggests adjustments to ensure its continued effectiveness in today's world, including the integration of digital literacy, global citizenship, personalized learning, adaptability, indigenous knowledge, and environmental consciousness. Ultimately, the study underscores the need to critically evaluate and adapt the Nigerian philosophy of education to address contemporary challenges, equipping students to thrive in a dynamic and interconnected global space or world stage, while upholding the philosophy's core values and preparing future generations for meaningful contributions to society.

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