



NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

**PHILOSOPHY, ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE, AND DIGITAL
EDUCATION**

VOLUME 35 NO. 1, OCTOBER, 2025

ISSN: 0794-0114

e-ISSN: 2971-5652

Published by

PHILOSOPHERS OF EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (PEAN)

www.peanpapers.com.ng

Formatted & Printed in Nigeria by



www.timsmek.com | info@timsmek.com | +234-703-455-9895

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Teaching Philosophy and the Nature of Truth in Education

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Abstract

The problem of epistemology: nature of knowledge and what should be taught in schools is not a recent issue. For it has been agreed by many philosophers of education that what should be taught in the school should be based on truth. Again, there is controversy on what constitute truth based on many philosophies and theories of truth in line with schools of philosophical thoughts of education. Thus, there is need to understand the various teaching philosophy to guide scholar on how knowledge or truth should be taught in the school in order to build good individuals and

society. There is also need to learn the nature of truth, types and theories of truth. This paper, therefore, discusses the meaning of teaching philosophy and the major teaching philosophy or philosophical schools of educational aims and their relationship to truth and knowledge acquired by the learners. The work looks at perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and reconstructivism and what they hold in the teaching-learning process. The paper also appraised the nature of truth, types of truth and theories of truth. On the types of truth, the work considers the objective truth, subjective truth and normative truth. On the theory of truth among many, the work considers correspondence theory, coherence theory and pragmatic theory and analysed their influences on the teaching philosophies.

Keywords: Epistemology, Teaching philosophy, Truth.

Introduction

Teaching philosophy or philosophical schools of educational aims is an area in epistemology. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that study the nature, origin and limits of human knowledge. The term is derived from the Greek word *episteme* (“knowledge”) and *logo* (“reason”). Epistemology is sometimes referred to as the theory of knowledge. All human wish to comprehend the world they live in, and in doing so many theories will be formulated. In the area of knowledge, many schools/theories have been formulated to guide the thinking thoughts of the people on how knowledge is gained and the means to teach this knowledge.

There are many teaching philosophy or philosophical schools of educational aims, such as perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and reconstructivism. These four schools of thoughts do not exhaust the list of possible teaching philosophy, but they present a strong frameworks for scholars to refine the educational philosophy. Other schools of philosophical thoughts which we will not be considered here are the liberalism, humanism, existentialism, conservatism, behaviorism, positivism and constructivism among others.

What is to be taught in the school as knowledge should be an idea or fact that is true. Truth is a concept in epistemology, because knowledge must be based on truth. There are many types of truth, but the researchers shall consider three very important types relevant to the field of epistemology such as objective truth, subjective truth and normative truth. Furthermore, beliefs held by these teaching philosophies must be true if not there cannot be knowledge. Therefore, the researchers shall examine the theories of truth and relate the various theories of truth to a related teaching philosophy. There are many theories of truth in philosophy of education such as correspondence theory, coherence theory, pragmatic theory, Tarski’s semantic theory and deflationary theories like redundancy theory, performative theory and prosentential theory. In this work, the researchers shall analyse only the basic theories of truth which are correspondence theory, coherence theory and pragmatic theory.

Teaching philosophy

Teaching philosophy is a set of beliefs that give direction in the practice of pedagogy and process of learning. These philosophies according to Obot (2015), are called philosophical schools of educational aims. This is also known as content based philosophy. This helps in prioritizing the teaching goals and scope of educational philosophy. The scope of educational philosophy is the study of all those aspects or issues in philosophy which are relevant to teaching

and learning. According to Ravi (2015), the scope of educational philosophy includes areas such as aims of education, curriculum, methods of teaching, the teacher, the child/learner/student, textbooks, assessment, school administration, new issues in education and discipline. The researchers shall briefly look at the scope of educational philosophy to guide the appraisal and give a direction to this paper.

Aims of education: educational philosophy via these teaching philosophies help in determining the aims of education. Aims of education is determined by knowledge of related circumstances and problems of the society. For instance, the building of a sound mind and essential knowledge will be for perennialism and essentialism respectively, while the development of practical and entrepreneurial knowledge and knowledge to reform the ills of the society will be for the progressivism and reconstructivism respectively. Therefore, a teaching philosophy plays a role in determining the aims and objective of education.

Curriculum: teaching philosophy and other philosophical schools provide adequate support to educators in formulating the subject content for the school system. The curriculum of perennialism will contain issues like history, literature, mathematics, philosophy among other subjects that will develop sound values in the learners. The curriculum content of the essentialists will involve subjects that will help in achieving the aims of the learner and society including science and technology education to solve society's problem. The curriculum of progressivism will contain practical subjects and entrepreneurship education. The curriculum of reconstructivism will contain subjects such as civil education, government, history, moral and religious education among others to help in reforming the value system of the society.

Method of teaching: teaching philosophy help in determining the method of teaching in the school. The method of teaching must suit the curriculum content and the aims of education so that teaching can be attractive and consider the interest and abilities of the learner.

Teacher-student: the role and position of the teacher and the student in the process of teaching-learning is determined by the teaching philosophy. The teacher is the center figure in perennialism and essentialism, while the student is the center in progressivism and reconstructivism.

Textbooks: the teaching philosophy also help and provide guidelines in the writing and preparation of textbooks according to the aims of education, the curriculum content, the method of teaching and the place of the teacher/student, the age, interest, attitudes and abilities of the learners, and also the growing needs of the society.

Discipline: teaching philosophy provides the kind of discipline in the school system, either authoritarian classroom as in perennialism and essentialism or democratic classroom as in progressivism and reconstructivism. The authoritarian discipline looks at corporal punishment while the democratic discipline looks at self-control, freedom of the learner and other methods of social discipline.

As stated above, the basic and core teaching philosophies are perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and social reconstructionism. Other teaching philosophies which are not included in this paper include liberalism, humanism, conservatism, positivism and behaviorism. All these

help in the development of education aims, curriculum content, methods of teaching among others issues in the teaching-learning process.

Perennialism:

This centers on the teaching of core subject. It is a subject-centered philosophy. The approach focuses on the teaching of ideas that have everlasting and universal value and truth. The perennialists believe that knowledge transcends time and that education should teach students to think rationally and develop minds that can think critically and also look at the spiritual aspects of the learner. This school of thought is subject-centered philosophy.

Perennialism is aimed at building in learners the ability of reasoning and critical thinking and addition to basic teachings of ancient philosophies, literature and thinkers such as Plato, William Shakespeare, Aristotle and Albert Einstein. The teacher here, is responsible for guiding the learners to learn how to think critically and logically. A perennialist classroom aims to be a closely organized and well-disciplined environment, which developed in learners a lifelong quest for truth and make effort that the ideas of logic and critical thinking are built in the minds of the learners. Here, the teacher is the main actor. The learner is a passive actor in the educational process.

Essentialism

This focuses primarily on the teaching and mastering of core basic subjects and skills. It is a subject-centered philosophy. The essentialists believe that education should only teach basic skills or transmit only what is essential in the society. They also advocate the training of the mind to be rational and critical and for the formation of moral character in the learner. Essentialists emphasize skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, science, history, art, music and languages, with technology being a new addition. (Indeed, 2023).

Essential teaching method often involved discussion, lecture, rote practice and standardized assessment.

Progressivism

This considers the significance of individuality and its connection to active learning. This teaching philosophy was developed by John Dewey's pedagogy, based on pragmatism. Experience represent the core idea of this teaching philosophy. The progressivists believe that progress, and change are fundamental to one's education. That people learn best from what they consider most relevant to their lives and abilities. Education to them should focus on the whole student, rather than on the content or the teacher.

Progressivist teaching philosophy is a student-centered philosophy. They emphasize on group activity and problem solving so that the learners can learn through cooperative strategies. It uses experimentation, interaction and cooperation teaching methods. It stresses that learners should test ideas practical and the learner's experiences of the world by doing.

Reconstructivism

Reconstructivism is a philosophical theory holding that societies should continually reform themselves in order to establish more perfect governments or social networks. It is a philosophical movement within the field of education, sometimes called social reconstructionism. Social reconstructionism is a philosophy that emphasizes the addressing of

social questions and a quest to create a better society and worldwide democracy. The role of educationists is that of change agents and social architects, according to them. They emphasized individual experiences in the learning process of education and liberal principles of education, such as freedom, democracy and egalitarianism. It is a student-centered philosophy. They believe that educational aims should be adjusted and reconstructed to meet current and pressing needs of the individual and the society.

Reconstructionist educators focus on a curriculum that highlights social reform as the aim of education. It encourages education to focus on alleviating the pervasive social inequalities and reconstruct society into a new and more just and social order. They argued that social problems in the society such as racism, insecurity, corruption, sexism, prostitution, cultism, tribalism, nepotism favouritism, environmental challenges (pollution, climate change, global warming, ozone layer depletion, flood and erosion, among other), poverty, drug abuse, violence, sexual transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS among others are rooted in ignorance and lack of knowledge. Therefore, education through the school, is an ideal place to begin ameliorating social problems. That is to say, schools should help and teach learners ideas that will reform the society.

The reconstructivists recognized that education is the means of preparing people for creating a new social order in the society. It asserts that educators must develop curricula and pedagogical techniques specifically to reconstruct society and educational practices from their current state.

There are five major tenets of reconstructivism. They are:

- i) Society and education require constant reconstruction;
- ii) Programs of study should be interdisciplinary;
- iii) Education is being used to build a new social order and educate individuals into new citizenry behavioral roles;
- iv) A rationally educated humankind can direct the process of social and conscious evolution toward progressive goals and thus control humankind's destiny; and
- v) Educational socialization must now be both globalist and futuristic in its orientation.

The teacher here must model democratic principles. Learning should be in a democratic culture and the learners should select learning objectives and social priorities. The teacher should create lessons that will inform the emotion and intelligence of the learners about the inequality in the society and the need for social justice, egalitarianism and social order. The teacher's role is just to guide the learners. This teaching philosophy has proponent like George Count, Paulo Freire, Theodore Brameld and Karl Marx

Nature of truth

The definition of the concept truth can vary depending on the context in which the term is used. Truth is generally understood to be that which corresponds to reality, consistent with facts or that which produces result. According to Obot (2025), truth is that which is in accordance with fact, reality, or actuality. That is to say something that is trustworthy and in accordance with fact or reality. Truth can be something which everyone believes it.

Types of truth

They are various types of truth depending on the area of scholarship. In philosophy and philosophy of education we shall explore the following types: objective truth, subjective truth and normative truth

Objective truth: this refers to truth that are independent of individual beliefs, opinions, feelings, or perspectives. They are considered to hold universal ideas regardless of whether anyone believes them or not. This is truth established using scientific evidence and logical reasoning. We believe that something is true regardless of our emotions and biases. Objective truth is also known as absolute truth. Objective truth are universal and absolute in nature (Lynch, 1999). Plato is one of the proponent of objective truth. He believed in a concrete, objective truth, that exists outside of human control and that humans discover truth and not create truth. Truth to him is eternal in the world of ideas. This influences the perennialist school of philosophical aims.

Subjective truth: this is truth based on human perception, culture, environment and opinion. Subjective truth is also known as relative truth. This is because what one hold to be true may differ with what another hold to be truth; all based on different perception of the event or reality. Subjective truth is proved by subjective means and shared by a group of people with the same point of view. However, perceptions, opinions and intuitions are leading our researches based on subjective truth. Our interpretation of scientific research is also based on our opinions. The question now is, is there objective truth? The eternal and absolute ideas are conceived in the mind of humans and expressed as opinions of knowledge. This influences the progressivist and reconstructivist schools of philosophical aims.

Normative truth: this is also known as aesthetic truth. This is truth based on debate, critical thinking and values. Some scholars have argued that normative truth is subjective in nature, which is why it raises debates and questions. This, however varies with each individuals' point of view, because it answer questions like what is best or what ought to be. This type of truth influences the essentialist school of philosophical aims.

Theories of truth

There are many theories of truth in philosophy of education, but the major theories are: correspondence theory of truth, coherence or consistency theory of truth, and pragmatic theory of truth

Correspondence theory of truth

This theory explains that truth is what propositions have by corresponding to a way the world is. That is a proposition is true provided there exist a fact corresponding to it. For example A is true only if A corresponds to a fact. Here, truth claim can be justified when there is a correspondence of what we claim to know by experiencing the object with our senses (eyes, ears, nose, skin and mouth/tongue). It is commonly held by the realists or empiricists.

The correspondence theory is relevant in the field of education. It helps in teaching with instructional materials for effective representation of what is thought. It is also used in solving empirical and scientific problems in education. This theory of truth has a relationship with progressivism, essentialism and reconstructivism.

Coherence theory of truth

This theory explains that truth can be justified by a statement arising out of a relationship between that statement and other statements. It posits that what is claimed to be true is by itself internally consistent with other established facts or knowledge. It believes that ideas in the human mind which are consistent with their ideals in the world of ideas are truth. This theory is also referred to as consistency theory by some authors (Obot, 2015). The theory is held by the idealists.

This theory believes in logic and logic helps in the coherence presentation of educational ideas and thoughts for good understanding. This theory also helps in building of a sound mind of an individual for the good of the individual and the good of the society (Davidson, 2005). It helps in intellectual, theoretical and historical studies. It also helps to reveal how we arrive at what is truth claims and knowledge of the metaphysical world. This theory has influence on the perennialist school of philosophical aims or teaching philosophy.

Pragmatic theory of truth

This holds that a proposition is true if it is useful to believe. Utility is the essential mark of truth. Truth can be claimed when actions based on experiences with utility or that which produces satisfying consequences. Beliefs that lead to the best satisfactions, that are the best justification of actions, that promote success, are truth, according to the pragmatists (Lynch, 2009).

This theory helps education to be learner's centered, and explores human experiences. It also helps the learner to learn by doing or practical and entrepreneurship education. It helps in problem solving by learning what is workable and solution based. This theory is influenced by the progressivist school of philosophical aims by their views of practical and utility knowledge and knowledge by doing.

Conclusion

It is acknowledged universally that knowledge is based on different philosophies and what the school should teach is also based on different schools. Thus we have different schools of teaching philosophy such as perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and reconstructivism. Again, what is taught in school as knowledge must be true, the work considers the nature of truth and the types of truth and the theories of truth and analysed their relationship to the teaching philosophy. Knowledge of the teaching philosophy and the nature, types and theories of truth will enable the school system to appreciate the various sources of knowledge and what constitute knowledge. It will also help in building a worthwhile learner for the good of the learner and that of the society.

Suggestions

1. The school should teach subjects based on the needs of the learner and no learner should be forced to select subjects.
2. Practical and entrepreneurship education should be encouraged in the schools to help develop skills that will help the individual in the society.
3. Subjects that help build a sound mind and critical thinking should not be removed from the curriculum such as philosophy, history, music and art, among others.

4. Subject that can help in the reconstruction and reformation of the society like civic education, government, entrepreneurialship education, technical education should be encouraged in the schools.
5. The school system should be democratic in nature and build ideals of democracy, freedom and respect for human rights, egalitarianism, social justice and social responsibility of the learners.

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