

PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF PEDAGOGY FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Imoter Mark Shenge¹ & Terzungwe Emmanuel Igyom²

Abstract

The intersection of philosophy and education has remained pivotal in understanding how nations pursue meaningful development and social transformation. In Nigeria's context and other developing countries, persistent issues of inequality, corruption, poor governance, and underdevelopment highlight the inadequacy of traditional knowledge transfer models of education. This paper critically examines how philosophy, through the lens of critical pedagogy, can reposition education as a transformative tool for national development. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) explore the philosophical foundations that connect education with social change; (2) assess the liberatory role of critical pedagogy in challenging passive acceptance of oppressive conditions; and (3) propose philosophy-driven pedagogical approaches capable of reorienting curricula toward equity, justice, and active citizenship. This paper employs an analytic and critical review of relevant literature, drawing insights from Paulo Freire, African philosophers of education, and contemporary scholarship linking philosophy, pedagogy, and development. The study argues that embedding philosophy into pedagogy empowers learners to think critically, resist systemic injustices, and actively contribute to nation-building. It concludes that philosophy-informed pedagogy is indispensable for sustainable development, as it cultivates reflective, responsible, and transformative citizens capable of shaping more just and progressive societies.

Keywords: Philosophy, Education, Pedagogy, National Development

Introduction

The relationship between philosophy and education has been one of the most enduring in intellectual history. Both disciplines converge in their concern with questions of meaning, knowledge and human

¹. Dr. Imoter Mark Shenge is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi-Nigeria.

². Terzungwe Emmanuel Igyom is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, Federal University of Lafia-Nasarawa State.

flourishing. While philosophy seeks to interrogate the fundamental principles of existence, morality and knowledge, education translates these principles into practices that shape individuals and societies. In this sense, philosophy provides the normative foundations and critical lens through which education can be evaluated, while education operationalises philosophical ideals into concrete realities of social life.

Historically, this interdependence is evident in the works of philosophers who simultaneously served as educators. Socrates' method of dialogical inquiry, which demanded critical reflection from learners, laid the groundwork for the conception of education as the cultivation of rational autonomy. Plato, in the *Republic*, envisioned a just society whose stability depended upon a carefully designed educational system that harmonised knowledge, virtue and governance.³ Aristotle, building on this tradition, argued that education is indispensable for the cultivation of virtue and the fulfillment of human potential. These classical traditions underscore the timeless relevance of philosophy to the educational enterprise.

In modern thought, John Dewey's pragmatism exemplifies the deep interconnection between philosophy and education. For Dewey, education was the very essence of democracy, a process through which individuals learn to participate meaningfully in collective life. He argued that schools must be “embryonic communities” that not only transmit knowledge but also prepare individuals to engage in critical, participatory citizenship.⁴ Dewey's views echo into

³. See the *Republic* in Plato. *Complete Works*. (Grapevine Edition). (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2023).

⁴. Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*. (Macmillan, 1916), Pg. 78.

contemporary debates on the role of education in nation-building, emphasising that education is not merely an instrument of individual advancement but also a public good necessary for the survival and flourishing of democratic societies.

This philosophical foundation becomes particularly urgent when applied to societies facing systemic crises such as inequality, corruption, poor governance and underdevelopment. In such contexts, education ceases to be a neutral process and becomes a critical battleground where competing visions of society are contested. Philosophy, as the reflective discipline, provides the tools for diagnosing the limitations of existing educational models and for imagining transformative alternatives.

The Nigerian context presents a sobering case study in the failure of education to achieve its transformative potential. Despite decades of investment in schooling, Nigeria continues to grapple with some of the most pressing socio-political challenges of the developing world: entrenched inequality, endemic corruption, fragile governance structures and chronic underdevelopment. According to Adeyemi, Nigeria's educational system often produces graduates who are ill-prepared to engage with these challenges, largely because the system emphasises “certification over cultivation” and “rote memorisation over critical consciousness”.⁵

The persistence of inequality, both in access to education and in economic opportunities, reveals the inadequacy of educational structures to foster social mobility. For instance, rural communities

⁵. Adeyemi, B. B. “Integrating 21st Century Skills into Nigerian Curriculum: Teachers' Perspectives.” *Educational Reform Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, (2023), Pg. 92.

and marginalised groups remain disproportionately excluded from quality education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement. Moreover, poor governance in Nigeria reflects the absence of civic responsibility and ethical leadership, both of which are supposed to be nurtured through education. One of the central problems with the Nigerian educational system, as well as many systems in the developing world, lies in its reliance on traditional knowledge-transfer models. These models, inherited largely from colonial legacies, conceive of education as the mere transmission of information from teacher to student. In this “banking model,” as Paulo Freire describes it, students are treated as passive recipients whose minds are “deposited” with knowledge rather than as active co-creators of meaning.⁶

The inadequacy of this approach is starkly revealed in its outcomes. Learners trained under this system often excel in rote memorisation and examination performance but lack the critical skills to analyse, question or transform the unjust conditions of their society. As a result, educational institutions churn out individuals who may be intellectually equipped in narrow technical domains but are ethically and socially unprepared to challenge the structural conditions of inequality and corruption.

Philosophy, Education and Social Change

The philosophical foundations of education provide the framework through which societies articulate the aims and purposes of schooling. Philosophy determines whether education is conceived narrowly as vocational training or broadly as the cultivation of critical and responsible citizenship. In contexts of inequality and

⁶. Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, (Continuum, 2000), Pg. 72.

injustice, these philosophical foundations determine whether education will reproduce the status quo or serve as a catalyst for transformation.

Critical theorists such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer warned against education that uncritically serves dominant power structures, arguing instead for an education that cultivates the capacity for resistance and critical reflection. In a similar vein, Paulo Freire contended that education is inherently political: it either functions as a practice of domination, where learners are conditioned to accept existing social hierarchies or as a practice of freedom, where learners develop critical consciousness to challenge oppression (*conscientização*).⁷

Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach reinforces this view by stressing that education must go beyond technical competence to nurture the moral and imaginative faculties necessary for democratic citizenship. According to Nussbaum, societies that prioritise economic growth while neglecting education in the humanities and philosophy risk producing citizens who are “useful machines rather than reflective human beings”.⁸

African philosophers have also emphasised the transformative role of education when grounded in indigenous values. Kwasi Wiredu argues that the philosophical foundation of African education should be built upon principles of communalism, justice and consensus, reflecting African modes of governance and moral

^{7.} Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Pg. 72.

^{8.} Nussbaum, Martha C. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. (Princeton University Press, 2010), Pg. 98.

thought.⁹ Kwame Gyekye similarly emphasises that education in African societies must integrate the moral and cultural values of the community with modern scientific knowledge, thereby producing individuals who are both globally competent and locally rooted.¹⁰

These perspectives converge on the insight that philosophy must inform the aims, content, and methods of education if it is to serve as a driver of societal transformation. Without a philosophical foundation, education risks becoming a mere instrument of economic or political expediency, devoid of ethical orientation.

Paulo Freire's Contributions to Critical Pedagogy

Paulo Freire remains one of the most influential thinkers in educational philosophy, particularly through his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire challenged the prevailing “banking model” of education, in which students are treated as empty vessels into which teachers deposit information. He argued that this model reduces learners to passive recipients and mirrors the dynamics of oppression in broader society. Instead, Freire advocated for a dialogical, problem-posing model of education in which teachers and students learn together through mutual dialogue and critical inquiry.¹¹

Central to Freire's thought is the concept of *conscientização* (critical consciousness). For him, education should cultivate learners' capacity to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against oppressive elements of

⁹. Wiredu, Kwasi. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. (Indiana University Press, 1996), Pg. 45.

¹⁰. Gyekye, Kwame. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. (Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996), Pg. 131.

¹¹. Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Pg. 72.

reality. “Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom,” Freire declared, emphasising that it is never neutral.¹² This radical claim situates education at the heart of social transformation, making it a practice that can either reinforce domination or enable liberation.

Freire's insistence on dialogue as the foundation of learning reflects a philosophical anthropology rooted in human dignity and agency. He believed that human beings are unfinished and in constant becoming and that education must respect this unfinishedness by empowering learners to co-create knowledge and shape their societies.¹³ His critique resonates strongly in post-colonial contexts like Nigeria, where education often reproduces authoritarian pedagogies and fails to empower citizens to resist systemic corruption and inequality.

Building upon Freire, subsequent scholars have explored the dual role of education as both a tool of domination and a practice of freedom. Henry Giroux, a key proponent of critical pedagogy in North America, emphasises that education is inherently political and cannot be divorced from struggles over power and inequality. Giroux insists that schools must be sites where learners engage in critical dialogue about issues of justice, democracy, and social responsibility. According to him, “pedagogy must be understood as a cultural practice that gives meaning to experience, produces knowledge and constructs identities”.¹⁴

^{12.} Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Pg. 34.

^{13.} Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Pg. 84.

^{14.} Giroux, Henry A. *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*. (Bergin & Garvey, 1988), Pg. 14.

Bell Hooks, in her influential work *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), advances a similar critique by situating pedagogy within the context of race, gender and class oppression. She stresses that education must be a practice of freedom, particularly for marginalised communities whose voices have been silenced by dominant structures. For Hooks, engaged pedagogy requires teachers to bring their full selves intellectual, emotional and ethical into the classroom, thereby creating spaces of mutual respect and empowerment.¹⁵ She warns that education that neglects the affective and ethical dimensions risks reproducing alienation rather than transformation.

In African contexts, the distinction between education as domination and education as liberation is particularly salient given the history of colonial education. Colonial systems were designed to create intermediaries, clerks, interpreters, and administrators who would sustain colonial rule rather than challenge it. As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o observes, colonial education functioned to alienate Africans from their languages, cultures, and histories, thereby sustaining structures of domination.¹⁶ To reclaim education as a practice of freedom requires deliberate efforts to decolonise curricula, methodologies, and values.

One of the primary aims of critical pedagogy is to challenge passive acceptance of systemic injustices. In Nigeria, the persistence of corruption, weak governance, and inequality is partly due to a culture of silence fostered by educational practices that discourage

¹⁵ Hooks, Bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. (London: Routledge, 1994), Pg. 22.

¹⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. (Heinemann, 1986), Pg. 88.

questioning authority. As Adeyemi notes, students are often trained to reproduce knowledge uncritically rather than to interrogate the conditions of their society.¹⁷ This passivity contributes to the reproduction of corrupt elites who view education merely as a pathway to personal advancement rather than a responsibility to the collective.

Freire warns that without critical consciousness; learners may internalise the values of their oppressors and become complicit in their own domination. This phenomenon is evident in Nigeria, where educated elites often perpetuate the very structures of corruption and inequality they should be dismantling. Education that fails to develop critical agency thus risks becoming a mechanism for sustaining oppression rather than transforming it.

Scholars like McLaren argue that critical pedagogy must therefore engage learners in identifying and resisting “the hidden curriculum” of schools, the implicit lessons about obedience, hierarchy and conformity that sustain unjust social orders.¹⁸ By unveiling these hidden curricula, learners can begin to see how education both reflects and sustains systemic injustice.

The Role of Critical Pedagogy in Nurturing Critical Consciousness

The liberatory potential of education lies in its capacity to nurture critical consciousness. Freire defines critical consciousness as the ability to perceive contradictions in social reality and to take action

^{17.} Adeyemi, B. B. “Integrating 21st Century Skills into Nigerian Curriculum: Teachers' Perspectives.”, Pg. 92.

^{18.} McLaren, Peter. *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*. 6th ed., Routledge, (2016), Pg. 67.

to transform them. This involves moving beyond naive consciousness, where individuals blame their circumstances on fate or individual failings, toward a critical understanding of systemic structures of power.¹⁹

Henry Giroux extends this notion by arguing that critical pedagogy must cultivate both intellectual and political agency. It is not enough for learners to understand the world critically; they must also be empowered to intervene in it. Education, in this sense, is inseparable from democratic struggle. Giroux insists that “critical pedagogy is not simply about learning how to read texts but learning how to read the world in order to change it”.²⁰

Bell Hooks reinforces this view by emphasising that critical pedagogy must be rooted in love, mutuality and respect. For Hooks, the cultivation of critical consciousness is not merely an intellectual exercise but a deeply ethical one, requiring teachers to empower students to reclaim their voices and to resist the dehumanising effects of systemic oppression.²¹ In African contexts, nurturing critical consciousness also requires reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems and confronting the legacy of colonial epistemologies. Wiredu and Gyekye stress that education must cultivate reflective citizens who are grounded in African values of communal responsibility while also capable of engaging global systems critically. Such a pedagogy would empower African learners not only to critique inherited colonial structures but also to

¹⁹. Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Pg. 85.

²⁰. Giroux, Henry A. *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, Pg. 21.

²¹. Hooks, Bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Pg. 29.

articulate indigenous alternatives for governance, justice and development.²²

Philosophy-Driven Pedagogical Approaches for National Development

The curriculum is one of the most significant sites where philosophy informs educational practice. A curriculum reflects not only the content of learning but also the values, priorities and vision of a society. In Nigeria and many developing nations, curricula remain largely examination-oriented, fragmented and detached from local realities. This has reinforced a culture of rote memorisation and credentialism rather than critical thinking and civic responsibility.²³

Philosophy-driven pedagogy calls for a fundamental reorientation of curricula toward equity, justice and active citizenship. Martha Nussbaum insists that curricula must prioritise the humanities, ethics and civic studies alongside technical knowledge, as these are essential for cultivating reflective and compassionate citizens.²⁴ She argues that societies that neglect philosophy and the humanities in favor of narrow economic utility risk producing “machines rather than humans,” incapable of sustaining democracy or social justice.

African scholars echo this concern. Julius Nyerere's *Education for Self-Reliance* emphasised that curricula must be rooted in

^{22.} See Wiredu, Kwasi. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Pg. 45; Gyekye, Kwame. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Pg. 131.

^{23.} Oni, S. A. *Curriculum Development in Nigeria: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Issues*. (Lagos: Sunshine Press, 2014), Pg. 63.

^{24.} Nussbaum, Martha C. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Pg. 98.

communal values and address the immediate developmental needs of society such as agriculture, local industries and civic responsibility.²⁵ Similarly, Kwasi Wiredu advocates curricula that integrate indigenous modes of knowledge and communal ethics, ensuring that education remains relevant to African realities.²⁶ By embedding philosophy into the curriculum, education moves beyond technical instruction to the cultivation of values. Philosophy equips learners to ask “Why?” and “What ought to be?” rather than simply “How?” This reflective orientation is critical for fostering equity, justice and active citizenship in Nigeria and other developing contexts.

The Role of Philosophy in Shaping Values, Ethics and Social Responsibility

Education is never a neutral activity. It always reflects and transmits values, whether explicitly or implicitly. The question, therefore, is not whether values should be taught in education, but which values, and by what means. Philosophy provides the framework for critically examining and selecting the values that education should prioritise.

In the Nigerian context, the absence of a strong ethical foundation in education has contributed to the normalisation of corruption and civic irresponsibility. As Ocho observes, “a nation that educates for knowledge without ethics will inevitably reap the fruits of governance without conscience”.²⁷ Philosophy addresses this gap

^{25.} Nyerere, Julius K. *Freedom and Socialism: Uhuru na Ujamaa*. (Oxford University Press, 1968), Pg. 29.

^{26.} Wiredu, Kwasi. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Pg. 45.

^{27.} Ocho, L. O. *The Philosophy of Education for Nigeria*. (Harrison Publishers, 1988), Pg. 55.

by insisting on the centrality of ethics, justice, and responsibility in the aims of education.

African communitarian philosophy emphasises values such as solidarity, justice, and respect for human dignity. Kwame Gyekye, for instance, highlights the principle of sankofa learning from the past to guide the present as a crucial value that should shape African education.²⁸ Incorporating such philosophical values into pedagogy can counter the alienation produced by colonial and technocratic models of education.

Practical applications include courses in civic education, ethics and philosophy of leadership, which emphasise not only abstract reasoning but also concrete applications to governance, community development and nation-building. By embedding philosophical inquiry into education, societies can cultivate citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also morally responsible and socially engaged.

Practical Strategies for Embedding Philosophy into Pedagogy

Operationalising philosophy within pedagogy requires deliberate strategies that transform both teaching methods and institutional structures. Several strategies stand out:

Dialogical and Participatory Learning: Inspired by Freire, classrooms should be spaces of dialogue where learners actively engage with knowledge, question assumptions and co-create understanding. This requires moving away from lecture-based, authoritarian teaching toward participatory, student-centered

²⁸ Gyekye, Kwame. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Pg. 131.

approaches.²⁹

Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems: African philosophies emphasise the importance of grounding education in local realities. Incorporating indigenous knowledge, such as traditional dispute resolution, communal farming practices, and moral storytelling, ensures that education resonates with learners' lived experiences while also fostering critical reflection.³⁰

Philosophy Across the Curriculum: Rather than isolating philosophy as a specialised discipline, philosophical inquiry should permeate all areas of study. For instance, scientific subjects can incorporate ethical discussions about environmental sustainability, while economics can include debates about justice and distribution. This cross-curricular approach reinforces the inseparability of knowledge and values.³¹

Civic Engagement and Experiential Learning: Learners should engage directly with communities through service-learning projects, civic participation and problem-solving initiatives. Dewey argued that education must be experiential, connecting theory with practice.³² Such experiential pedagogy allows learners to apply philosophical concepts of justice and responsibility in real-world contexts.

^{29.} Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Pg. 72.

^{30.} Wiredu, Kwasi. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Pg. 45.

^{31.} Nussbaum, Martha C. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Pg. 101.

^{32.} Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*, Pg. 87.

Teacher Training in Philosophy of Education: Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping pedagogy. Training programs should integrate philosophy of education, equipping teachers with critical and ethical perspectives that guide their teaching. As Adeyemi argues, teachers who lack philosophical grounding often reduce education to rote instruction, thereby undermining its transformative potential.³³

Implications for Nigeria and Developing Countries

Philosophy-Informed Pedagogy and the Challenge of Governance

One of the most pressing problems facing Nigeria and many developing countries is the crisis of governance. Corruption, nepotism, weak institutions, and lack of accountability have undermined efforts toward national development. Conventional education, with its emphasis on technical instruction and certification, has proven insufficient to produce citizens and leaders capable of addressing these challenges.

Philosophy-informed pedagogy offers an alternative by foregrounding ethical reflection, critical consciousness, and civic responsibility. According to Ocho, “the problem of governance in Nigeria is not merely technical, but moral and epistemic; it is about how knowledge and values are internalised”.³⁴ By embedding philosophy into education, citizens are better equipped to question corruption, resist authoritarian tendencies, and demand accountability.

^{33.} Adeyemi, B. B. “Integrating 21st Century Skills into Nigerian Curriculum: Teachers' Perspectives.”, Pg. 92.

^{34.} Ocho, L. O. *The Philosophy of Education for Nigeria*, Pg. 57.

Furthermore, the philosophical emphasis on justice and equity enables education to confront systemic inequalities in governance. Kwasi Wiredu notes that African nations must not simply replicate Western models of governance but must instead develop political systems rooted in African values of consensus, communalism and justice.³⁵ A philosophy-informed pedagogy would nurture citizens who can both draw from indigenous values and engage critically with modern democratic practices.

Addressing Inequality and Social Fragmentation

Nigeria and other developing nations are characterised by deep inequalities in wealth, education, gender and ethnicity. Traditional education often reproduces these inequalities, privileging urban elites while neglecting rural communities and marginalised groups. Philosophy-informed pedagogy, however, emphasises inclusivity and justice. Paulo Freire's idea of education as a practice of freedom highlights the need to engage the voices of the oppressed in the educational process.³⁶ By adopting dialogical and participatory teaching methods, schools can become sites where learners from different backgrounds engage as equals, fostering mutual respect and social cohesion.

African scholars reinforce this vision. Julius Nyerere argued that education should dismantle social hierarchies and serve the collective good, rather than reproducing elitism.³⁷ Similarly, Ifeanyi Menkiti's communitarian philosophy stresses that personhood is realised through participation in communal life, suggesting that

³⁵ Wiredu, Kwasi. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Pg. 112.

³⁶ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Pg. 85.

³⁷ Nyerere, Julius K. *Freedom and Socialism: Uhuru na Ujamaa*, Pg. 41.

education must foster solidarity and social responsibility.³⁸ Implementing such philosophies in pedagogy could reduce divisions along ethnic, religious and socio-economic lines in Nigeria.

Cultivating Reflective, Responsible and Transformative Citizens

The ultimate goal of philosophy-informed pedagogy is the cultivation of citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also reflective, responsible and transformative. Nussbaum describes such citizens as “world citizens,” capable of critical reasoning, empathy and participation in democratic life.³⁹ In Nigeria, where political apathy and civic disengagement are widespread, nurturing such citizens is vital for national renewal.

Education that integrates philosophy equips learners with tools of reflection enabling them to evaluate policies, critique societal norms, and resist manipulation. As Adeyemi observes, “citizens who are educated without philosophy are like craftsmen without compasses: skilled, but directionless”.⁴⁰ By fostering ethical awareness and civic responsibility, philosophy-driven pedagogy produces leaders and followers alike who prioritise justice and collective well-being.

The transformative citizen also embodies resilience and

³⁸. Menkiti, Ifeanyi A. “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought.” *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Ed.), (Blackwell Publishers, 1998), Pg. 172.

³⁹. Nussbaum, Martha C. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Pg. 110.

⁴⁰. Nussbaum, Martha C. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Pg. 95.

adaptability. In a rapidly changing world marked by technological innovation, globalisation and climate change, philosophy fosters the capacity for critical problem-solving and moral discernment. As Dewey argued, democratic societies require citizens who are not passive recipients of authority but active participants in shaping the future.⁴¹

Education as a Tool for Nation-Building and Sustainable Development

Philosophy-driven pedagogy contributes to nation-building by providing a shared moral and intellectual foundation for society. Education that cultivates justice, responsibility and civic participation becomes the cornerstone of a national identity rooted not in tribalism or elitism but in shared values of equality and solidarity. Kwame Nkrumah emphasised the centrality of education in decolonisation and national unity, arguing that education must equip Africans to resist neocolonial domination while promoting self-determination.⁴² In Nigeria, this means developing curricula and pedagogical practices that foster a sense of belonging and responsibility across ethnic and religious divides.

Furthermore, philosophy-informed pedagogy directly supports the goals of sustainable development. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) emphasises inclusive, equitable, and quality education as foundational for achieving all other goals. By embedding philosophical perspectives on environmental ethics, inter-generational justice, and global responsibility into curricula, education in Nigeria can contribute

^{41.} Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*, Pg. 93.

^{42.} Nkrumah, Kwame. *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonisation*. Monthly Review Press, 1964), Pg. 70.

not only to immediate national development but also to sustainable futures.

Contemporary Challenges and Critical Views

Despite its promise, philosophy-informed pedagogy faces practical challenges in Nigeria and other developing countries. Critics argue that in contexts where resources are limited, prioritising philosophy and ethics may appear secondary to immediate technical skills and employment needs.⁴³ Others note that entrenched political interests may resist the transformative potential of critical pedagogy, fearing that it will empower citizens to challenge corruption and authoritarianism.⁴⁴

Moreover, implementation challenges such as inadequate teacher training, poor infrastructure, and examination-centered systems pose significant barriers. As Akinpelu cautions, philosophy of education can only succeed if backed by systemic reforms that align policies, teacher preparation, and assessment systems with philosophical goals.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, these challenges should not deter efforts to embed philosophy into pedagogy. Rather, they underscore the urgency of reform. As Nussbaum insists, “the cost of neglecting philosophy in education is not measured in GDP, but in the erosion of democracy

^{43.} Ellsworth, Elizabeth. “Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy.” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 59, no. 3, (1989), Pg. 301.

^{44.} Apple, Michael W. *Ideology and Curriculum*. (London: Routledge, 1990), Pg. 38.

^{45.} Akinpelu, J. A. *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*. (Macmillan, 1981), Pg. 64.

and humanity”.⁴⁶ In the Nigerian context, where corruption and inequality have stalled development, the adoption of philosophy-informed pedagogy is not an abstract luxury but an existential necessity.

Concluding Remarks

The relationship between philosophy and education has always been more than academic abstraction; it is foundational to how societies define their values, construct their institutions, and pursue social transformation. In Nigeria and other developing countries, where inequality, corruption, and poor governance have perpetuated cycles of underdevelopment, the inadequacy of traditional knowledge-transfer models has become increasingly evident. Education that merely imparts technical skills, without cultivating moral vision and critical reflection, risks producing citizens who are efficient but ethically disoriented, skilled yet complicit in systemic injustices.

This study has argued that philosophy, when integrated into pedagogy, redefines education as a transformative practice. From the historical nexus between philosophy and education in shaping civic responsibility, to Paulo Freire's radical insistence that education must be a practice of freedom rather than domination, the philosophical underpinnings of pedagogy provide the intellectual and moral compass necessary for national development. Education, informed by philosophy, does not only transmit knowledge but nurtures justice, equity, and civic consciousness values urgently needed in societies struggling with fragmentation and poor governance.

⁴⁶ Nussbaum, Martha C. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Pg. 115.

The review of critical pedagogy revealed that education can either reinforce domination or challenge oppression. By fostering dialogue, reflection, and critical engagement, philosophy-driven pedagogy resists passivity and equips learners to confront systemic injustices. As scholars like Freire, Nussbaum, and African philosophers such as Nkrumah and Wiredu emphasise, education must empower learners to imagine alternative futures, challenge inequalities, and build more just societies.

The implications for Nigeria and other developing countries are profound. Philosophy-informed pedagogy has the potential to cultivate reflective and responsible citizens who are not only capable of questioning corruption and injustice but also willing to engage in the hard work of nation-building. It reorients education from a narrow pursuit of credentials toward a broader social mission of fostering democratic participation, solidarity, and sustainable development. As Ocho and Akinpelu remind us, such a transformation requires systemic reforms in curricula, teacher training, and educational policies. Yet the costs of inaction continued corruption, inequality, and democratic erosion are far greater than the challenges of reform.

Critics may argue that in resource-constrained contexts, philosophy and ethics are luxuries. However, as Nussbaum persuasively insists, neglecting philosophy in education leads to a loss not only of civic virtues but also of the very humanity that binds societies together.⁴⁷ The true test of an educational system is not how many graduates it produces but the kind of citizens it forms whether they are passive subjects or active agents of transformation.

⁴⁷ Nussbaum, Martha C. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Pg. 115..

In conclusion, this paper reaffirms the indispensability of philosophy in pedagogy for national development. Nigeria and other developing countries must reimagine their educational systems, embedding philosophy at the heart of teaching and learning. Such a transformation is not a mere academic exercise but a practical necessity for building societies that are critical, just, and progressive. Education must go beyond the transfer of knowledge to cultivate the moral and civic capacities needed to confront the persistent challenges of inequality, corruption, and underdevelopment. Only then can education fulfill its promise as the foundation of social transformation and nation-building.

Bibliography

- Adeyemi, B. B. "Integrating 21st Century Skills into Nigerian Curriculum: Teachers' Perspectives." *Educational Reform Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2023, pp. 67–80.
- Adorno, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Akinpelu, J. A. *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*. Macmillan, 1981.
- Apple, Michael W. *Ideology and Curriculum*. Routledge, 1990.
- Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*. Macmillan, 1916.
- Ellsworth, Elizabeth. "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy." *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 59, no. 3, 1989, pp. 297–324.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, Continuum, 2000.
- Giroux, Henry A. *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*. Bergin & Garvey, 1988.
- Gyekye, Kwame. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996.
- Hooks, Bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge, 1994.

- McLaren, Peter. *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*. 6th ed., Routledge, 2016.
- Menkiti, Ifeanyi A. "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought." *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, Blackwell Publishers, 1998, pp. 171–181.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Heinemann, 1986.
- Nyerere, Julius K. *Freedom and Socialism: Uhuru na Ujamaa*. Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Nkrumah, Kwame. *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonisation*. Monthly Review Press, 1964.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Ocho, L. O. *The Philosophy of Education for Nigeria*. Harrison Publishers, 1988.
- Oni, S. A. *Curriculum Development in Nigeria: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Issues*. Lagos: Sunshine Press, 2014.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Complete Works. Grapevine ed., Hackett Publishing Company, 2023.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. Indiana University Press, 1996.