

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Nigerian secondary school teachers often adopt teaching methods that conflict with their stated educational philosophy, creating a gap between theory and classroom practices that undermines learning outcomes. Philosophical foundations like pragmatism, and existentialism shape curriculum goals in Nigeria, their actual influence on daily teaching practices in secondary schools remain poorly documented. This paper has discussed the impact of the philosophical underpinnings of education on teaching and learning in Nigerian secondary schools and the poor connection between philosophy and classroom practice that leads to poor learning outcomes. The study discovered through qualitative study with content analysis that idealism and realism dominate teaching in the Nigerian secondary school classrooms, and therefore the teaching method is teacher-centered and focuses on factual knowledge; pragmatism and existentialism, which promote experiential and learner-centered learning, are seldom practiced. Findings indicate that teachers' philosophical orientation significantly shapes instructional methods, with pragmatists favoring group work and problem-solving activities among students, while existentialists favoring student choice, self-expression, and reflective dialogue. It is therefore recommended that the integration of these philosophical contents with practical learner-centered pedagogical skills, which is accomplished by improving teacher education, curriculum development, and training should be improved to enhance educational outcomes.

Introduction

Educational Foundations: Theoretical and philosophical foundations that inform teaching, learning, design of curriculum, policies and instruction practices. Idealism, realism, and pragmatism are some of the philosophies that define education systems all over the world, which shape the educational goals and practices in reaction to socioeconomic and technological shifts (Abang, 2025). These philosophies contribute to the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and thus are crucial to successful educational practice.

On the African level, education systems are usually faced with the challenge of aligning the indigenous values with the Western models, which makes the systems inconsistent in curriculum delivery and instruction. This is more pronounced in Nigeria, where the country has a wide socio-cultural setting and developmental requirements. As Irabor and Onwudinjo (2022) observe, numerous issues in education are associated with poor philosophical grounds that fail to fully capture the needs of society, leaving gaps between the policy intentions and practical approaches in the classroom. Low student engagement, ineffective teaching, and alignment of curriculum, as well as the lack of moral education as a means to help young people overcome their challenges, remain a problem in Nigerian secondary schools (Aruo, N.C., Nwinya, S.A., Chukwu, D.O., & Orji, J.M. (2024). These

predicaments point to the apparent lack of touch with the classroom reality and philosophical ideals, and the necessity of greater synthesis to enhance education and learning outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study to analyze the impact of philosophical underpinnings on instruction and learning in Nigerian secondary schools. In particular, the research aims to:

1. Examine major philosophical foundations of education.
2. Assess their influence on teaching practices.
3. Evaluate their impact on students' learning outcomes.

Research Questions

1. What are the major philosophical foundations of education?
2. How do these philosophies influence teaching practices?
3. What is their effect on students' learning outcomes?

Concept of Educational Foundations

The foundations of education are the principles that inform the organization, meaning and practice of education and embrace philosophical, sociological and historical approaches. These pillars influence the design and implementation of education systems to make sure they are aligned to societal values and development agendas in Nigeria (Irabor and Onwudinjo, 2022). They give guidance to the educational policies, curriculum design and instructional practices. Unclear purposes and inappropriate execution are common outcomes of weak or obsolete foundations (Nnajofofor, 2022). Moreover, the curricular and assessment procedures are shaped by the educational foundations. Balogun (2023) has highlighted the importance of the integration of indigenous African philosophies in order to create cultural relevance without compromising on global standards, which requires strong foundations for effective teaching and learning.

Concept of Philosophy of Education

Philosophy of education is the study of what education is, what its goals are, and what problems it faces, which gives a framework to assess teaching practices and policies. It deals with major issues regarding what should be taught, how it should be taught and the end of education. According to Sulyman, Yusuf, & Elias (2025), it was defined as a combination of philosophical thinking and educational practice to make decisions. It is instrumental in solving issues of curriculum relevance, moral growth, and national identity in Nigeria. Okpara (2023) maintained that it has to adapt to satisfy the needs of society and the world. It also affects the innovation in education, especially the use of technology, because the philosophy affects the use of emerging tools to improve the outcomes of learning (Ezeanolue, Ekeh, Ezewuzie & Okpara, 2025).

Concept of Teaching and Learning Practices

The teaching and learning practices refer to the strategies and interactions employed in the process of developing knowledge and skill, such as instruction, assessment, and classroom management. Adegbile, Afuya & Abel (2023) discovered that participatory and technology-based interventions enhance student engagement and achievement. The

philosophical orientations of the teachers influence these practices and determine the way instruction is delivered. Schrier, Ohu, Bodunde, Alugo, Emami & Batunde (2021) showed that experiential learning enhances critical thinking and collaboration. In Nigeria, however, resource constraints and lack of training are a limit to implementation. According to Abiakwu (2025), teaching necessitates striking a balance between traditional and innovative practices in a robust philosophical context.

Schools of Philosophy of Education (Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, Existentialism)

The key schools of philosophy of education, including idealism, realism, pragmatism, and existentialism, provide different, but interrelated perspectives on teaching and learning. Idealism focuses on ethics and intellectual growth, and educators focus on shaping their students to become characters and realize themselves (Okpara, 2023). Realism, on the other hand, emphasizes objective knowledge and scientific investigation and advocates structured curricula and practical applications like observation and experimentation (Sulyman et al., 2025).

Pragmatism focuses on experience, finding solutions, and flexibility as a way of learning, promoting innovative and technology-based approaches to teaching (Abiakwu, 2025). Existentialism places an emphasis on personal freedom and personal meaning, and it supports learner-centred learning, allowing creativity and independence (Nnajofofor, 2022). Such philosophies are complementary and cover the areas of moral development, factual knowledge, practical skills, and individuality. They can enhance the efficiency and pertinence of teaching and learning practices in the Nigerian secondary schools through their integration (Balogun, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Constructivism Theory

Constructivism, which was developed by Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978), is a theory that learners actively build knowledge by interacting with the environment. It focuses on cognitive growth, social engagement and experience-based learning, which encourages critical thinking and teamwork. It has the potential to overemphasize when it is undertaken using inquiry-based learning, group discussions and problem-solving activities, but when it is used effectively, it is good because students in Nigerian secondary schools can participate actively and attain a deeper level of understanding.

Progressivism Theory

Progressivism, which was created by John Dewey (1859-1952), is a form of education that focuses on the interests and experiences of learners to equip them to take part in society (Dewey, 1938). It encourages experiential learning, classroom democracy, and the development of skills. Although it improves creativity and flexibility, it might not be structured and could excessively focus on the interests of the students. Project-based learning and real-life problem-solving through it make education more engaging and relevant to students in Nigerian secondary schools.

Empirical Review

Empirical research illustrates varying attitudes towards the use of philosophical foundations in education and learning in Nigeria. In *Piloting a Game Jam in Nigeria to Support Empathy and Compassion*, Schrier et al. (2021) studied experiential learning based on constructivism and progressivism. The research concluded that empathy and collaboration were enhanced by the use of a qualitative experimental design. It concluded that learner-centered strategies promote holistic development yet were oriented toward short-term interventions, which created gaps in long-term classroom implementation.

In the article *Nigerian Philosophy of Education: An Appraisal*, Okpara (2023) critically examined the philosophical structure of Nigeria in the light of the African philosophy and qualitative approaches. The analysis discovered that the philosophy is not coherent and practically applicable, which restricts its impact on instruction. It suggested that philosophy should be aligned with the implementation of the curriculum, but failed to establish the connection between these gaps and classroom practices empirically.

In *Meaning and Discipline of Philosophy of Education and Its Relevance to Nigerian Education*, Sulyman et al. (2025) relied on a descriptive qualitative study based on idealism and realism. The research discovered that philosophy improves critical thinking and teaching performance in teacher education when incorporated in the teacher education curriculum. It advised intensifying philosophical training but failed to look at actual classroom issues, thus creating a gap in implementation.

Abiakwu (2025) discussed the connection between philosophy and technology in a pragmatic approach and qualitative study. The researchers determined that technology enhances learning but has no philosophical focus, which leads to varied results. It suggested the establishment of philosophically-based digital pedagogy, yet failed to offer empirical data on student outcomes.

In their research on philosophy and emerging technologies in universities, Ezeanolue et al. (2025) used a constructivist-based survey design. These results revealed that philosophical awareness enhances the use of technology in teaching. The research suggested constant professional growth, but gave emphasis on tertiary institutions, not secondary schools.

On the whole, the analyzed articles prove that the philosophical grounds have an impact on teaching and learning, especially based on the learner-centered styles. Nonetheless, there is a huge gap between the theories of philosophy and the actual classroom practice in Nigerian secondary schools. The majority of studies are conceptual or emphasize higher education, and there is scant empirical information that links philosophical underpinnings to instruction and student achievements. The gap is discussed in this study through the impact of these in Nigerian secondary schools.

Methodology

This paper chose a qualitative approach of research that employed content analysis to analyze the impact of philosophical grounds of education on teaching and learning in secondary schools in Nigeria. This method was appropriate since it aimed at the interpretation of meanings and patterns in the existing literature as opposed to numerical data. The descriptive type of qualitative design was selected in order to realize a thorough examination

of philosophical ideas and their consequences with the help of systematic analysis of the corresponding documents and academic literature.

The population of the study was academic sources on the topic of philosophy of learning, teaching, and learning in Nigeria, such as journal articles, conference papers, policy documents, and textbooks published between 2021 and 2025. Relevant and credible sources relevant to the research objectives were selected using a purposive sampling technique to focus on recent and contextually relevant literature.

The content analysis guide was structured around major themes, including philosophical foundations, teaching strategies, learning outcomes and learning challenges, as the basis of data collection. Validity and reliability were achieved by correspondence to the research objectives and the similarity of coded procedures. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data to determine recurrent patterns and how philosophical underpinnings determine teaching and learning in Nigerian secondary schools.

Results and Discussion

Results

Thematic analysis of the chosen academic sources on philosophical foundations of education and its impact on teaching and learning practices in Nigerian secondary schools was used to derive the results of this study. The results were summarized into the major themes that represented the research aims: philosophical orientations, effect on teaching practice, and effect on learning outcomes.

Theme 1: Hegemonic philosophies in education in Nigeria.

The results revealed that idealism, realism, pragmatism, and to a smaller degree, existentialism are the prevailing philosophical orientations. The focus on moral education, developing character, and inculcating values was a manifestation of idealism. This is consistent with Okpara (2023), who observed the great emphasis on moral education, and Balogun (2023), who emphasized the contribution of African philosophy to communal values and responsibility.

Structured curricula that were subject-centred reflected realism, especially in science and technology education. The teaching practice focused on factual knowledge, observation, and examination performance, which confirms Sulyman. (2025), who attributed such practices to the realist principles.

Pragmatism was present in more recent reforms spurred by the encouragement of skill acquisition and integration of technology, but it was not widely implemented. Abiakwu (2025) noticed that practical learning can be improved using pragmatic approaches, yet they are not implemented to the maximum. There was limited use of existentialism and not much emphasis on the autonomy of the learner. In general, there are philosophical orientations which are unevenly implemented in classroom practice.

Theme 2: The impact of philosophical underpinnings on teaching practices.

The results showed that the philosophical grounds have a great impact on teaching practices, though it is not always explicit. Idealism advocated teacher-centered methods, in

which teachers serve as the pillars of authority, passing knowledge and moral values. This is evident in classroom control and lecture-based teaching.

Realism also helped to create orderly content-based pedagogy with a focus on the factual truth and memorization. Ugwu (2022) noted that most teachers have shifted to rote learning and uniform approaches, emphasizing on preparation of examinations instead of thinking.

Pragmatism also impacted interactive and learner-centered approaches, although it was not widely used. Other researchers, including Schrier(2021), and Adegbile et al. (2023), demonstrated that experiential learning enhances interaction and teamwork. These approaches are, however, limited by the large class sizes, inadequate resources, and institutional constraints.

The results also indicated that teachers have low levels of philosophical awareness, hence teaching inconsistently. According to Ezeanolue(2025), philosophically knowledgeable teachers are more inclined to use innovative practices, and philosophical training is an important aspect of education.

Theme 3: Effect on learning outcomes of students

Philosophical underpinnings were discovered to impact on the cognitive, social and moral growth of students. Idealist practices favored moral growth, but they had few effects regarding critical thinking. Aruo et al. (2024) stressed that moral education targets the problematic issues among youth, yet it requires good classroom performance.

Realist methods enhanced the factual knowledge and academic achievement, particularly standardized tests, but restricted creativity since it depended on memorization. Practical approaches led to better problem-solving, teamwork, and interaction, and experiential learning increased retention and comprehension. They were, however, less widely adopted, thereby diminishing their overall impact.

Minimal approaches, termed existentialist, promoted self-awareness and self-reliance. Nnajiofor (2022) observed that creativity is encouraged in learner-centered methods, yet creativity is not a common practice in Nigerian secondary schools.

Theme 4: Issues related to the use of philosophical grounds.

Several barriers affected the successful implementation of philosophical underpinnings, such as teacher training, philosophical ignorance, resource deficiency and inflexible curriculum. Irabor and Onwudinjo (2022) highlighted that educational philosophies cannot be practically implemented due to systemic challenges.

Policy-classroom disconnect was another issue. Although policies mirror philosophical ideals, there are constraints of overcrowded classrooms and the absence of instructional materials. Abiakwu (2025) noted that pragmatism, which is also consistent with technology integration, is constrained by the lack of infrastructure. In general, philosophical foundations play a very important role in teaching and learning, but are limited by structural issues.

Discussion

The results showed that philosophical backgrounds have a great influence on teaching and learning in Nigerian secondary schools; idealism and realism prevail. This goes along with Okpara (2023), who observed that moral education and systematic conveying of knowledge were highly valued. The restricted use of pragmatism and existentialism, however, indicates a disconnect between the old philosophies and the new needs of education.

The results are consistent with the constructivist theory developed by Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978) that focuses on the active learning process and social interaction. The above positive results of participatory learning affirm that students can learn better when engaged. Likewise, the study found a series of benefits in the experiential and problem-based learning, which is representative of the progressivism suggested by Dewey (1938).

The findings are empirically consistent with those of Schrier et al. (2021) and Adegbile. et al (2023), who identified that interactive teaching techniques enhance engagement and collaboration. Nevertheless, this paper builds upon their results by demonstrating that these methods are not common in Nigerian secondary schools because of systemic constraints.

Teacher preparedness was also found to be crucial in the study, which favors the Ezeanolue et al. (2025), who stressed philosophical awareness in effective instruction. In the absence of this, educators will be less inclined to embrace new practices. Furthermore, the issues found are similar to those of Irabor and Onwudinjo (2022), who associated educational constraints with systemic problems.

In general, philosophical foundations offer a good theoretical foundation, but their success requires practical application by training teachers, reforming the curriculum, and enhancing teaching materials.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the philosophical underpinnings of education and how these philosophies affect teaching and learning activities in Nigerian secondary schools. It confirmed that instructional practices, student engagement, and learning outcomes are influenced by idealism, realism, pragmatism, and existentialism, but their usage is still not consistent and frequently implicit. The results showed that idealism and realism prevail in the teaching practices, leading to the teacher-centered approach and focus on factual knowledge, whereas pragmatism and existentialism, which foster the experiential and learner-centered learning, are less successfully employed.

This imbalance inhibits the ability of students to develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. The investigation also revealed that ineffective teacher education, philosophical ignorance, inflexible curriculum, and lack of resources are some of the factors that undermine the proper introduction of philosophical ideas in the classroom. This results in a lack of connection between the theory and practice of education.

In the study, it is argued that, to enhance secondary education in Nigeria, there must be conscious inclusion of principles of philosophy in the teaching systems through better teacher training, curriculum development and implementation of new teaching methods.

Systemic issues also need to be addressed in order to make philosophical ideals become practical classroom results.

Recommendations

1. Education programmes for teachers need to be reinforced with thorough training in philosophical underpinnings to improve instructional efficacy.
2. The policies of the curriculum must be reorganized to include and incorporate the various educational philosophies that will foster not only theoretical education but also practical skills.
3. Professional development programmes should be continuous and aimed at providing teachers with new and updated, learner-focused teaching methods.

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