

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL INSIGHTS FOR EDUCATIONAL RELEVANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Decades after the auspicious adoption of the National Policy on Education, Nigeria's hope of developing by realizing her national goals, using education as a means, has remained an unmitigated illusion. A general feeling of disillusionment inevitably trails the nation's education sector. Nettled by a miscellany of hamstringing issues, the sector, unarguably, faces an untoward crisis of irrelevance to the national needs – as articulated in the national goals. This has wreckfully constricted the nation's match to progress and national development since independence. With concern for the sector heightened in recent times, education experts and philosophers in the country are engaged in the debates on the best way to re-position the sector for maximum sense of relevance to the national development. This paper contributes to this important quest. Using Kingsley Price's framework for 'educational relevance and irrelevance', it interrogates the Nigerian education system, identifying cases of its irrelevance to the national goals. The defective epistemic assumptions about the nature of knowledge and learning – which, unfortunately, undergird educational practices in the country – is identified as the root of the crisis to the nation's educational relevance. As a way forward, the paper argues that incorporating insights from epistemology into education has the prospect of enhancing the cause of educational relevance in Nigeria. The paper adopts the expository, analytic and critical methods.

Keywords: Epistemology, Educational Relevance, Teaching, Learning, Education Epistemology.

Introduction

The importance of education to national development cannot be over-emphasized. In his *Republic*, Plato acknowledges the connection between education and national development by making education one of his central themes, and recommending a state-controlled and a compulsory education for all citizens (524d-526d). Down the centuries, education has generally been appreciated as “an indispensable aspect of socio-political plan which forms the central pillar of development in the society” (John Nwizarh 2000: 72). Many international rights

instruments today, consider education to be a key index of human development, and also “provided for it as a fundamental human right” (United Nations, 1996: 36).

In line with this global acknowledgement, the Nigerian government, particularly, recognizes education as “an instrument for national development through which the country’s national goals can be achieved” (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004: 6). Since her independence in 1960, the country has engaged in the provision of educational services to her citizens under diverse educational schemes and educational policy directives and activities in view of realizing her national goals. The adoption of *The National Policy on Education* in 1977 was a major highpoint in the nation’s optimism in realizing her national goals, using education as a means.

However, decades after the adoption of this policy document, the nation’s dream of realizing her national goals through the instrument of education has largely remained a delirious hallucination, especially due to the crisis associated with educational relevance in the country, which has reached a level, which deserves the declaration of a state of emergency. Taking a critical look at Nigeria’s educational sector with the ultimate view of identifying the epistemic roots of the crisis of its relevance to the national goals, this paper recommends the incorporation of insights from the epistemology into the nation’s educational system as the way towards addressing the crisis and enhancing the cause of educational relevance in Nigeria.

The Concept of Education

From its etymology, the word “education” derives from the Latin words, *educare* and *educere*, which, respectively, means, “to lead out” and “to train or form” (Schofield, 1972: 32). Whereas the former (*educare*) trails from Plato’s idealistic tradition that the human person is born with certain innate ideas and that the duty of education is to “lead out these ideas”, the latter (*educere*) is based on Aristotle’s realistic tradition that at birth, the human mind is a *tabula rasa* (a blank slate), upon which the process of education eventually writes impression or knowledge. However, attempts by some modern philosophers of education and educationist to define education from diverse perspectives can provide some further inroads into the broad idea and subject of education. For instance, from the sociological perspective, William Frankena defines education as “the process of ‘enculturation’ or ‘socialization’ of the younger generation by the older” (1973:19). From the humanistic point of view, education is conceived as “the process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of his potentials and his maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and to achieve this by his perfect self-fulfilled inclinations” (Okafor, 1984: 16).

According to Richard Peters, who conceives education from the ethical/normative perspective, education involves the transmission of something worthwhile or desirable in a morally acceptable manner to the individual members of the society:

Education implies the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it, education must involve knowledge and understanding and some sorts of cognitive perspective(s) which is not inert; education at least, rules out some procedures of transmission on grounds that they lack wittiness and voluntariness on the part of the learner (1967: 45).

Peters’ definition – to which this paper subscribes – appears, however, to incorporate other perspectives and delineates three acceptable criteria by which a process can be judged as education or not. The first is that what is educational must be valuable or worthwhile as each society decides to transmit to her younger generation. Second, the process of education must include contents that will enhance knowledge and understanding, which must be understood and applied when and where necessary. Third, the method and techniques applied in imparting

the knowledge must be acceptable. Such methods as indoctrination, drilling, memorization, threats, and so on, cannot, therefore, count as education since, “they do not produce a rational (critical minded, reflective and constructive) or an autonomous human being” (Amaele, 2007: 21).

Thus, education can be understood as the intentional transmission of what is desirable to individual members of a society with acceptable methods, to make them have adequate knowledge that will enable them to contribute their quota to the overall well-being and good of the society. By implication, education, basically seeks to equip the individuals with knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for personal and professional growth, so that they become empowered to equally contribute to the overall well-being, development and progress of their society as a whole. Education, therefore, involves not just the assimilation of traditional knowledge but also the development of new consciousness and new attitudes towards oneself and reality. Babs Fafunwa captures this point this way: “education is the aggregate of all the processes in which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive values to the society in which he lives....” (2004: 3).

Often, education takes place within a certain constellation of cultural conditions. This makes the contents of education differ from society to society, and primarily influenced by the preferred values of the society, which it expects to transmit to her citizens. In reference to this, D. O’Connor (1980: 7) notes that, “the educational system of any society is more or less elaborate social mechanism designed to bring about in the persons submitted to it certain skills and attributes that are judged to be useful and desirable in the society”. Education may be formal, where teaching and learning are “conducted through schools and institutions devoted to learning and acquiring worthwhile skills and techniques for life” (Okolo, 1989: 18), or informal, which involves the general social process by which human beings acquire the knowledge and skills needed to function in their culture. This may come from other social agencies such as the home, peer-group, society, mass media, and religious bodies. This paper is mostly concerned with the formal education.

Epistemology and Education

A general idea of epistemology and its relation to education is pertinent for an appreciation of the intimate connections between the two concerning the issue of knowledge and its transmission. To be sure, knowledge is a situational imperative for everyman to enable him resolve his existential problems as he navigates his way through existence. Epistemology is that aspect of philosophy, designed to equip man with the necessary intellectual facilities to distinguish and identify knowledge from falsehoods and unfounded claims. It devotes itself “to the questions of how to develop informed beliefs, construct knowledge and discover truth (Chaffee, 2005: 437). Its range of concerns, therefore, include the examination of the origin, nature, justification and scope of knowledge. David Hamlyn defines epistemology as “that branch of philosophy which is concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, its presuppositions and basis, and the general reliability of claims of knowledge” (1980: 8-9). Thus, the basic mission of epistemology is to clarify the meaning and nature of human knowledge or what the conception of knowledge involves by seeking to resolve such questions as: What is knowledge? What does it mean to know? Where does knowledge come from? What can man know? How is knowledge justified?

For this important mission, epistemologists, generally agree that knowledge is more than mere opinion of something that may coincidentally happen to be true. “To know” requires not only that a *belief* and its *truth* condition be satisfied, but also that the satisfaction of the *belief* condition be appropriately related to the *truth* condition in such a way that what is claimed to be known is appropriately *justified*. This *justification* condition must exclude all coincidental events as chance, luck, guesswork, etc., about the belief. Without this, it may be possible for one to believe a true but groundless conjecture, or a conjecture which happens to be true by mere chance, and yet, would not thereby be said to *know* such a conjecture. This is why, the traditional conception of knowledge in epistemology is “justified true belief”. These tripartite conditions for knowledge are so basic in epistemology that even the contemporary challenge raised by Edmund Gettier, which basically unveils the challenges with the *justification* condition (which may sometimes be false even when our belief is true), does not refute their necessity, but simply alludes to the need for a supplementing condition for knowledge (Dancy, 1991: 25).

For epistemologists, therefore, knowledge is not fixed product but is a reality constantly subject to critical evaluation, refinement and revision. Epistemology, thus, challenges humans to develop critical consciousness that “helps them to rise above epistemic naivety, whereby they swallow whatever information that comes to their minds” (Ijiomah, 2013: 14). It enables man to effectively and constantly interrogate knowledge-claims about reality whatsoever, to ascertain their reliability, justification and dependability, to be able to live authentically and actualize himself in the world with more informed, certain and justified knowledge of reality. Epistemology is a strong companion to education since both are concerned with the act of knowing or acquisition of knowledge. In the first instance, epistemology may be seen as the motor of education, because it drives the educational process. Since epistemology is a theory of knowledge, and education is the process whereby knowledge is being transmitted or acquired, it makes sense to appreciate that epistemology basically constitutes the theoretical background for educational practices and activities. This much is clear from the fact that whatever educational theories and practices one employs would be consistent with one’s conception of knowledge. For instance, “the assumption about the important sources of knowledge will certainly be reflected in curricular emphases and teaching methodologies” (Gope, 2022: 9). Also, the “epistemological beliefs of teachers and learners can shape learning environments, influence learning outcomes and pedagogical strategies” (Maged, 2023: n.pg). This shows how the development of a sound epistemic consciousness is crucial for effective teaching and learning processes in education.

Again, the relation and relevance of epistemology to education is clear from the fact that many concepts of educational import are essentially epistemic in nature. For instance, the concepts of learning, that is, having to do with an individual’s moving from a state of less to greater knowledge; and the concept of teaching, having to do with someone instructing another in order to bring about learning, and education, are essentially epistemic concepts (Carter and Ben, 2003: 5). Furthermore, the aims of education are sometimes characterized in terms of certain kinds of epistemic goods, such as the production of knowledge: “the fundamental aim of education, like that of science, is the promotion of knowledge” (Alvin Goldman, 1999: 23). Evidently, epistemology is fundamental relevant to education as it provides the theoretical backdrop for understanding how knowledge is constructed and validated, as well as the epistemic good sought through the aims of education. It provides the worthy and appropriate framework for the constant review of educational practices both in its theoretical and practical dimensions, in “when this is done, education comes off the better, qualitatively and qualitatively” (Ozumba, 2009: 46).

Hence, the knowledge of epistemology can be highly beneficial to education, as it is capable of creating a more engaging and intellectually stimulating learning environment that fosters critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and open-mindedness in both teaching and learning. Epistemology holds significant importance in education by shaping an individual's views and attitudes towards knowledge, impacting learning outcomes and better understanding of educational subjects. In fact, understanding epistemic cognition and process skills is essential for effective learning across disciplines in education. Epistemology also aids in detecting learning difficulties and directing strategies to overcome them. More precisely, teachers with exposure to insights from epistemology are likely to possess such critical and creative epistemic consciousness that will influence the perception of their subjects and teaching styles in a manner that impact on their teaching experiences as well as active learning outcomes from the students. Both the teachers and learners are likely to possess what Israel Scheffler calls "flexibility of the mind capable of transcending, reordering and exposing the given" (1973: 78). With such epistemic mindset, the learners become encouraged to critically reflect on their learning experiences to become more "self-aware learners" (Abdullah, 2023, n. pg.), explore alternative viewpoints for a more profound understanding and retention of learned material, and to enhance their ability to adapt learning strategies to different contexts.

This helps to avoid such defective approaches to teaching and learning as indoctrination, drilling, memorization or banking system, threats, and so on, which cannot count as education since "they do not produce a rational (critical minded, reflective and constructive) or an autonomous human being" (Amaele, 2007: 21). Also, students with training in the rudiments of epistemology are more likely to engage in deep learning strategies, such as critical thinking. They are likely to be problem solvers in the society in comparison with students without such training, who are less likely to be less critical thinkers, unadventurous and immersed in the phenomenal and conceptual given. Such students who only absorbed the necessary information in schools from their teachers – specific facts, data, theories, formulae – in time for the examinations which comes at the end of the leaning process, can neither claim knowledge of the subject of learning, nor can they be regarded as beneficiaries of an education that can positively contribute to development in the society.

Kingsley Price's Concept of Educational Relevance

The words "relevance" and "irrelevance" are currently in use in educational discussions today, and the expectation that educational in general, has to be relevant, has gained currency in recent times. In his work, *On Educational Relevance and Irrelevance*, the American Educational philosopher, Kingsley Price, presents a scholarly analysis of the criteria for determining educational relevance or irrelevance. Price begins by noting the essentially *relational* nature of the concepts of relevance and irrelevance: "if a thing is said to be relevant or irrelevant, it is always appropriate to ask, 'relevant to what'? Or, 'irrelevant to what'?" (1975: 220). He relates further that the concept of "educational relevance" is not to be understood as "logical relevance", which applies only to propositions as in the case of the premises, "All men are mortal, Socrates is a man", which is logically relevant to the conclusion that "Socrates is mortal". In such a case, what is logically relevant are items that are true or false, and their logical relevance is the fact that the truth or falsity of the premises determines the truth or falsity of other propositions – of those we may conclude from them (1975: 222). Rather, "the terms, 'relevant' and 'irrelevant', in educational discussion, according to Price, "can apply only to educational practices such as, a practice of curriculum, of method, of administration, or of instructions" (1975: 222).

Concerning the *target domain* of educational relevance or irrelevance, that is, that to which an educational practice, method, etc. must relate in terms of relevance or irrelevance, Prince says that “in order that an educational practice be considered to be relevant or irrelevant, as the case may be, it is necessary that it bears or fails to bear a certain relation to some other item as the case may be” (1975: 222). Of course, this other item “does not have to be educational in character; for, the relevance or irrelevance of an educational practice, is a relation between it and something else, not itself an educational practice” (1975: 222). According to Price, educational relevance is like a means-end relation; but unlike other cases of ‘mean-end relation’ – where the end must be desired by someone – the essential *characteristic* of the end to be brought into existence in case of educational relevance is that such end “ought to exist” (1975: 226). In other words, there is a necessary moral obligation carried by such end to be brought about by education in case of educational relevance, otherwise, educational relevance cannot be so attributed. Price, illustratively, notes: “if the study of Baldwin and Cleaver is relevant, then the clarification of the interracial problems, which it fosters, ought to exist quite independently of the fact of it being desired or not desired” (1975: 222).

On the other hand, Price maintains that to attribute educational irrelevance to a practice, is, at least, to deny that it is relevant in either of the following ways: “By asserting that it is not conducive to a state of affairs that ought to exist, or by asserting that it is conducive to a state of affairs that ought not to exist” (1975: 227). Thus, for instance, the denial that the study of Baldwin and Cleaver is relevant to the clarification of interracial problems may be the assertion that it does not bring about what ought to be, or the clarification of interracial problems ought not to exist, then any educational practice that leads to it must not be relevant (1975: 227).

Thus, for Price, the concept of educational relevance contains two parts: One is the ‘conduciveness to’ between an educational practice and some other state of affairs; the other is the obligation to exist carried by that state of affairs. It is a conception of the relation of ‘conduciveness to’ and that of moral value carried by the state of affairs to which the ‘conduciveness to’ relates (1975: 228). Conversely, an educational practice or system is deemed irrelevant on two counts: “either where the educational practice is not conducive to what ought to exist or where it is conducive to what ought not to exist” (1975: 228).

The Crisis of Educational Relevance in Nigeria

As a nation, Nigeria, has her own overall goals which she pursues, and she considers education as a necessary tool for achieving these goals. In the *National Policy on Education* adopted in 1977 (reviewed in 1981, 1998 and 2004), the Federal Government of Nigeria declares that, “the nation’s policy on education is government’s way of realizing part of the national goals, which can be achieved using education as a tool” (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004: 6). The five major national goals of Nigeria (adapted from the Second National Development Plan of 1970-1974), endorsed in the *National Policy on Education* as the basic foundation for the nation’s educational services are, the building of:

- (a) A free and democratic society
- (b) A just and egalitarian society
- (c) A united, strong and self-reliant nation
- (d) A great and dynamic economy
- (e) A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens

From these broad policy and national goals are derived the nation’s educational goals. Framed with these national goals in mind and tailored towards their realization through the cultivation of relevant values and virtues that foster them, these educational goals are:

- i. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity,

- ii. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the Nigerian society,
- iii. Training the mind in the understanding of the world around, and
- iv. The acquisition of appropriate skills, ability and competence, both mental and physical as equipment for individual to live and contribute to the development of the society (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004: 8).

In terms of her educational policy organization, the Nigerian educational system is organized into the basic education (9 years), post-basic/senior secondary school education (3 years), and the tertiary education (4 to 6 years, depending on the program of study). The Federal Ministry of Education is responsible for the overall policy formulation and ensuring quality control, though school education is also the responsibilities of states (secondary) and local (elementary) governments. With the hope of realizing her national goals through educational services, the Nigerian government has over the years invested in the education sector through budgetary allocations at various levels of governance for the provision of basic educational infrastructures and facilities policy directives and allied educational programs.

However, a critical assessment of the extent to which Nigeria has realized her national goals using education as a means, not only leaves much to be desired, but ultimately reveals a major crisis of educational relevance facing the country, using Price's concept of educational relevance and irrelevance as our guide. It is a common phenomenon that the Nigerian educational practices and policy programme implementations have been generally defective and ineffective, yielding quite disappointing outcomes, measured in terms of students' learning outcomes and contributions to the realization of the national goals for national development (Jacob *et al.* 2021: 23). For instance, the national goal of a *free and democratic society*, which education ought to foster *through the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity*, is far from being realized. For, several decades after the adoption of the education policy document, "rather than a free and democratic society, Nigeria has become a country where citizens are in chains...." (Amaele, 2007: 95-96).

Everywhere in the country echoes with festering sores of human rights abuses, oppression, repression, tyranny, a hypothermic level of corruption and undemocratic practices. In his *Rape of Democracy*, John Odey reveals that "Nigerians are pinning away under the ferocious grip of tyrants and despots in the name of democracy, as human rights abuse assumes such an alarming dimension in the country that it now borders on national tragedy" (2001: 92). Victor Inoka concludes that "as far as the goals of freedom and democracy are concerned, the Nigerian society has come to be a frustrating one" (2003: 131). Clearly, this unfortunate outcome betrays the absence of the requisite sense of national consciousness and democratic values – needed to realize this national goal – which education ought to, but has failed to foster among Nigerians. Given this situation, education practice in Nigeria may be said to be irrelevant to this national goal in the country. Remis Bamisaiye agrees that Nigeria's inability to achieve a free and democratic society is due to the failure of her education system "to invest our human resources with such freedom and democratic values as tolerance, impartiality, reasonableness, truth and fraternity, among others" (104).

The second national goal of a *just and egalitarian society* holds no different in outcome. A just an egalitarian society is a unit of human existence, where fairness and equity undergird the distribution of resources and opportunities. As clear anticipated in the nation's educational goal, such a society can be achieved for Nigeria with the help of an education that focuses on the

inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the Nigerian society. Unfortunately, however, despite years of the nation's engagements and investment in education, this goal is still far from realized for national development. Instead, the nation appears to be overwhelmed by the retarding forces of injustice, favouritism, nepotism, and all forms of sundry preferential means selectively adopted in the distribution of resources and opportunities for individuals and groups in the nation (Inoka, 2003: 134). Edward Adiele can be quoted to buttress this fact: "justice and egalitarianism in Nigeria remains a dream ...there is no equal distribution of the nation's wealth, no equal job opportunities and no fairness in the payment of wages and salaries" (2006: 102). Nigeria is fast degenerating into the Hobbesian "state of nature", which only law is the survival of the fittest (Hobbes, 1991: 89). Apparently, this sad outcome is a consequence of the absence of proper value orientation – the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the Nigerian society (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004: 8) – which education in the country ought to foster among Nigerians, but has, unfortunately failed. This, again betrays a case of irrelevance of Nigeria's education, using Price's conceptual framework.

Concerning Nigeria's third national goal, namely, the building of a *united, strong and self-reliant nation* – using education as a means, it might be said that the Nigerian society today is a frustrated one as far as this goal is concerned! A united strong and self-reliant nation is one galvanized together with patriotic citizens who have sense of belonging, and are prepared to work together always as a team for the nation's good. Such a nation is also not wanting in the provision of social securities and services for her citizens, and can capably defend her territorial integrity and has a good measure of economy resilience and autonomy. For the realization of this goal, education in Nigeria rightly aims at "the acquisition of appropriate skills, ability and competence, both mental and physical as equipment for individual to live and contribute to the development of the society" (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004: 8).

However, decades after the adoption of the national policy on education, there appears to be nothing about which cheer concerning the realization of this goal in the country. Rather, Nigeria remains a helplessly fragile geographical expression with little or no sense of nationhood, horrifically split into smithereens by the combined forces of ethno-religious and political violence, political exclusion, insecurity, threats of secessions, and economic backwardness. There remains, yet, an unfortunate dearth of proper value orientations and manpower development in Nigeria –necessary for the realization of this goal – which education ought to foster by the "inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the Nigerian society" and, "training the mind in the understanding of the world around" – but which it has, unfortunately, failed to do. As Ajeyalemi and Aloy assert, "our educational institutions have been efficient in the production of millions of ill-equipped graduates, majority of whom are roaming the streets in search of employment" (1987: 4). Again, within the context of Price's analysis of educational relevance and irrelevance, educational practice in Nigeria can be said to be irrelevant to this national goal, since it fails to foster the expected values among Nigerians, which can lead to its realization.

Furthermore, the fourth nation goal of building a *great and dynamic economy* is yet to become a reality in Nigeria. A great and dynamic economy implies an efficiently managed economic life, which maximizes the nation's natural endowments and ensures a functional economic well-being for the citizens, as well as the nation's economic competitive advantage on the global stage. As already anticipated in the national goals, such as goal can be realized for Nigeria with the help of an education that emphasizes the acquisition of the appropriate skills, ability and competence, both mental and physical as equipment for individual to live and contribute to the development of the society (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004: 8).

However, it is regrettable to note that despite several years of the nation's engagements and investments in education, "Nigerians cannot say we are a great and dynamic economy" (Udofia 2009: 74). Available economic indices, rather, show that the nation is in a hopeless economic quagmire, despite all! Characterizing Nigeria's present economic situation are: an all-high inflationary rate of 32.7 percent, pauperization of the citizens, massively underperforming manufacturing sector, mass exodus of foreign and local investors due to unfavourable business conditions, unstable foreign exchange markets, over reliance on foreign economic policies and loans, an import-driven economy, and a mono-economic model with 90% of the country's total revenue coming from petroleum. The country consistently ranks low in all indices of human development.

Underneath this failure is the lack of proper training and value-orientation for an effective human capital development in the country – which education ought to foster through "the acquisition of appropriate skills, ability and competence, both mental and physical as equipment for individual to live and contribute to the development of the society (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004: 8). Unfortunately, this is not the case. Ajeyalemi and Aloy underscore this point stating that Nigeria fails to become a great and dynamic economy because of the unfavorable irrelevant nature of the educational curriculum (1987: 8). Hence, "while millions of people among the educated Nigerians are unemployed, millions of jobs are waiting to be done, because people with the right education, training and skills cannot be found" (Adejuyigbe Aderalegbe, 1985: 26). Given this failure to foster the necessary dispositions for the realization of this national goal, education in Nigeria can be said to be irrelevant to this national goal.

Regarding the hope of realizing fifth national goal of making Nigeria *a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens*, using education as a means, it is doubtful to say that this has gone beyond mere paper work. Certainly, realizing such a noble goal requires proper mental and moral formation of the citizens through an education that fosters right type of values and attitudes that engender national consciousness and brotherhood, "respect for the worth and dignity of the individual, moral and spiritual principles in interpersonal and human relations, shared responsibility for the common good of the society" (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004: 8). However, several years down the line, Nigeria is yet to realize this goal, because of the politics of ethnic domination and socio-political and economic exclusion. Nigeria currently fits into what Max Weber calls 'social closure', being the culture of "restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of people in the society" (1947: 207).

Indeed, rather than a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens, Nigeria is a "closed" land with no equal opportunities for all except for a few who have captured the state and corruptly enrich themselves and amass public wealth and benefits for themselves and their cronies. Victor Inoka may be quoted to round-off this fact: "In the Nigerian society today, to get a contract, an admission or job placement, one has to belong to this or that organization, or be related to one highly-placed person or the other" (2003: 135). It is in view of this that Wole Soyinka describes Nigeria as "an open sore of a continent" (1996: 56). This shows that the country is from realizing the national goals. And this is because most Nigerian, especially those in power lack the right type of values and attitudes for the realization of this goal. Such values and attitudes necessary for the survival of the Nigerian society ought to be fostered by the education sector. Unfortunately, however, this has not happened decades after the adoption of the education policy document. In this instance too, education in the country may be said to be irrelevant as it has failed to foster the values that can bring about the realization of this national goal. It makes sense, therefore, that many educational experts blame the country's socio-political and economic underdevelopment on the nation's irrelevant education system: "Nigeria's socio-

political backwardness is to be blamed on the failure of the education system....” (Ojewale, 2008: 24). And as Joseph Okoh rightly observes, “our nation is at risk because we have been committing acts of unthinking unilateral educational disarmament... and have ended up producing graduates who are completely irrelevant to the society, graduates who have been miss-educated” (2014: 4).

Epistemic Issues in the Crisis.

To enable us provide an adequate epistemic solution to this crisis of educational relevance in Nigeria, it would be necessary to identify the epistemic dimension of the problem. In many researched literatures on the problem of educational relevance in Nigeria, it is common to put the blame on such social and administrative factors as poor funding, deterioration of educational facilities policy inconsistency, poor teachers’ welfare and training, scarcity and prohibitive costs of books, bribery and corruption, cultism in schools, and poor parenting (Odey, 2000:195; Raymon 2008: 33; Odia and Omofonmwan, 2007: 81). Important as these factors might be, there are, however, secondary to the basic epistemic issues constituting the theoretical background challenge to the matter. Until such fundamental issues are identified and decisively addressed, perhaps the problem will persist, irrespective of the attention given to address other factors.

The epistemic dimension to the problem of educational relevance in Nigeria relates to the defective epistemic background assumptions about knowledge and knowledge production – which basically inspires the activities of educators in most Nigeria’s educational institutions. Such defective epistemic assumptions are: the conception of knowledge as a fixed reality, to be transmitted directly to learners; and the belief that learning is a product rather than a process involving critical thinking and reflection. Guided by such assumptions often, most educators or teachers in the country, adopt such rote method of teaching and learning where students are basically made to acquire knowledge by stocking their minds with information, without being able to question the assumptions involved or construct well-founded beliefs in a manner that prepares them to be critical thinkers and problems solvers, who can contribute to national development. Leong Yew rejects such method of teaching and learning that is neither student-centred nor epistemic-sensitive, explaining that “genuine understanding occurs only when students are able to be thoughtful and reflective about the information and knowledge they have been presented with, and when they are sensitive to the goals of inquiry and are therefore able to be reasonable and judicious in their assessment of the processes and conclusions of inquiry” (2019: n.pg.).

However, on the contrary, as Amaele correctly observes, “the academic activities of the Nigerian schools are designed to inculcate facts into the learners’ memories. The assessment is equally based on the recall of facts” (2007: 162). Such rote system of teaching and learning only aims at making sure that students absorbed necessary information – specific facts, data, theories, methods, formulae in time, in preparations for the examinations at the end. It does not make room for the experience of genuine understanding and active learning in the nation’s institutions of learning in the country, where can students explore and question their learning experiences through critical thinking. Within such framework, the teachers’ goal is to make the students acquire the necessary credits, while the students, are, themselves, focused on passing examinations and obtaining certificates. Ike Onyechere submits that “such teachers ruin our children in schools because they are deficient in epistemic contents and methodology of pedagogical formation” (2010: 40). This explains why the education practice in Nigeria “place too much emphasis on paper qualification, instead of active learning for effective understanding” (2007: 204).

This being the case, most students in Nigerian institutions of learning do not have the ability to critically reflect on their learned experiences so as to become more “self-aware learners” (Abdullah, 2023, n. pg.). They are neither capable of exploring alternative viewpoints for more profound understanding and retention of learned experiences, nor in any way able to adapt such learned experiences to different contexts of life in the society, where the benefits of their education could be tested in terms of their resourcefulness and innovative solutions to concerns and issues that affect national interests. This has left the nation’s education sector prostrate, making the realization of the national goals through education quite difficult, since the beneficiaries of such education are mis-educated, ill-equipped, and ill-prepared for creative involvement in national life for national development. Adekunle Yusuf confirms that “the Nigerian educational institutions continue to turn our graduates, many of whom have little or no intellectual capacity to contribute to the economic growth of the nation” (Yusuf 2008: 70). It is in view of such unproductive educational outcomes that Matthew Lipman insists that “the focus of the educational process should not be on the acquisition of specific information and knowledge, but on the epistemic grasp of the relationships within and between the subjects under investigation” (2003: 34).

Again, such rote learning of facts – which David Hamlyn strongly rejects to calling ‘learning’ (cited in Carter and Ben, 2003: 6) – stemming from the identified defective epistemic assumptions – is equally repressive. In such educational practice, learning is accompanied with fear – either of punishment by the teacher or, ultimately, of failure in examinations – since assessments are based on recall of facts. Research shows that fear has long-term consequences on learners, and can actually make it harder for them to learn in meaningful ways. Deborah Pasternak, for instance, observes that “the more primitive parts of the brain take over the activity of the prefrontal cortex, the brain’s ‘control centre’, when we are in a state of fear” (2004: 1). And, so, “if children are faced with experiences that trigger fear, they learn to avoid new experiences – as opposed to exploring, engaging, and approaching the unknown with curiosity” (Pasternak 2004: 1). Hence, “the psychological condition of fear is not productive in learning environments like schools, where we are expected to be open to new experiences and create innovative solutions” (Pasternak 2004, 1). Such psychosocial condition of fear, often override every other consideration in the learner’s mind, directing their focus only to engagements in escapist activities that may enable them to avoid punishments from teacher and misconducts that enable them to pass their examinations.

Under such circumstance of fear, the learners become highly impervious and even resistant to any educational and formative measures seeking to inculcate in them the requisite ethical values and attitudes necessary for the survival of the society. Most of them readily turn to hooliganisms, cultism, examination malpractices and many even drop out of school – either as defense mechanism or survival kits. This explains why the it is difficult for the Nigerian education system from primary to the tertiary to inculcate and develop the proper value orientation and mental disposition in any meaningful way that makes the system relevant to the national goals, for national development (Amaele, 2007: 140).

Epistemology Education as the Way Forward

Since education is a *sine-qua-non* for national development, it becomes imperative to find a decisive solution to the above-identified epistemic issues, which are at the root of the crisis of educational relevance in Nigeria, if Nigeria must achieve her national goals and advance on the path of development. To tackle this effectively, it is pertinent for the nation’s education sector to intentionally incorporate insights from the framework of epistemology in her theoretical and

practical activities – since education of the motor of education. This will enhance educational relevance in the country, especially through improved teaching and learning experiences in schools, whereby the beneficiaries would be adequately prepared to contribute to national development in meaningful ways.

In the first instance, teachers in the country need to embrace the basic epistemic re-orientation that knowledge is not a fixed reality to be “handed-down” to the students, but a dynamic and an evolving phenomenon, subject to constant review, refinement and revision, and even reconstruction. This is necessary to secure in our teachers that “flexibility of mind” and epistemic consciousness, which are essential cognitive virtues for positive outputs in any educational endeavours. Teachers with such epistemic mindset are likely to help their students develop critical thinking skills that enable them to evaluate information and arguments more effectively. Their activities would be students-centred as they are likely to be open-minded towards their students, invite students’ perspectives on the subject-matter of learning, and would have no difficulty in managing their emotions well while dealing with the students in the classrooms.

In the same way, students should view knowledge as something that is dynamic, evolving, and co-constructed rather than a fixed reality or a given. This conception of knowledge will enable them to engage in dialogue and critical thinking in classrooms. With such mental disposition, they can discover different perspectives by challenging assumptions and think critically about the knowledge they encounter in classrooms. This is necessary to enable them to become more self-aware learners, capable of exploring alternative viewpoints on the subject-matter, for a more profound understanding and retention of learned materials. This, way, their ability to adapt learning experiences and strategies to different contexts outside the classrooms, for innovative solutions to societal problems and needs would be highly enhanced. By this measure, epistemology can contribute to education by promoting a learner-centered and experiential approach to education where students learn through hands-on experiences rather than rote memorization.

Again, for this purpose of epistemology education, teachers in the country need to particularly adopt an inquiry-based teaching approach, which aligns with constructive epistemology that promotes a more dynamic conception of knowledge as well as encourages an integrative approach to learning. This can be realized by regularly “posing open-ended questions in classrooms, encouraging exploration and discussion, and emphasizing the process of learning rather than the product” (Abdullah, 2023: 1). Besides, in terms of evaluation or assessments, the focus would be on understanding, critical thinking and, application of knowledge, rather than routine memorization or recall of facts. This way, teachers would now be able to use the opportunity of assessments not just as a measure of learning in their students, but also as a tool for learning that provides adequate feedback that supports students in their learning process.

Furthermore, there is the need to introduce the subject of ‘education epistemology’ into the curriculum of studies for educational sciences in the various Institutes and Colleges of Education in the country. This should be made compulsory for all teacher-trainees and those teachers in active service – through in-service training. Such a branched-subject in education sciences would be designed to teach critical process skills of epistemology within the general theory of education. In specific terms, the focus of the subject would be to clarify and determine the sources of knowledge and the epistemic justification conditions of the different kinds of knowledge and educational theories and practices. Equipping those in the teaching profession with such skills in epistemology will help them to develop more effective teaching methods,

such as teaching students how to evaluate sources of information and how to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources. It will help them to create a more engaging and intellectually stimulating learning environment that fosters critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and open-mindedness (Avrama, 2015, 276). It will help in the critical interrogation of the education sciences and in the critical analysis of the teaching methodology, to ensure their efficient fostering of educational goals for national development.

Conclusion

Whenever the subject of education in relation to national development in Nigeria is discussed, a feeling of general disillusionment arises in the mind! Such a feeling appears quite inevitable, given the sector's failure to foster the necessary intellectual and ethical values/virtues as required for the realization of the national goals for national development – as desired by the nation in the National Policy on Education adopted in 1977. Based on the framework of Prices' analysis of educational relevance and irrelevance, this failure demonstrates the challenge of educational irrelevance facing the country, and by reason of which she has failed to achieve most of her national goals. The root of the problem, as identified in the paper, is the defective epistemic assumptions about the nature of knowledge as a fixed, and learning as a product – embraced by most educators and learners in the country. To effectively address this problem, and so achieve meaningful sense of educational relevance in the country, these assumptions must be replaced with more dynamic concepts of knowledge and learning in line with constructive epistemology; and more insights from the framework of epistemology should be incorporated into the country's educational system.

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