

# **The Nature of Philosophy and the Nigerian Polytechnic Education**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The society today seems to be governed by denigrating acts which are perpetrated by individuals who ought to be morally upright; hence vices of all sorts are prevalent in the society today. It implies that many people have just little or no knowledge of philosophy which impacts the knowledge and awareness of the implications of human acts both in this world and in life after death. This study therefore, intends to educate polytechnic students, and the entire public on the rudiments of philosophy with the intent of inculcating in them, morality and decency to make the society habitable to all. The methodology employed in this study includes exposition, analysis, speculation, prescription, and phenomenology. The study reveals that the knowledge of philosophy is very important to mankind, as it creates the awareness of the moral responsibility of one's actions which motivates everyone to do good and avoid evil. It also reveals that the knowledge of philosophy helps one to discern truth and falsity in statements, validity, invalidity, soundness, unsoundness, and fallacies in arguments, wisdom that enables one to contradict the destructive ingenuity of fraudsters. The study concluded that wisdom rules the world and that any knowledge and expertise devoid of wisdom stagnates societal development in all ramification and can lead to a total collapse of the society hence the acquisition of knowledge of philosophy is a sine qua non in the Nigeria Polytechnic Education. The study recommends among other things that philosophy should be made compulsory at the tertiary education level.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Axiology, Education Polytechnic, Morality, Vices, Society

## **INTRODUCTION**

Axiomatically, man has been regarded as a psychosomatic being. This implies that man is a rational being and by virtue of his rationality, his actions have moral implications. Similarly, man due to his rationality, is a moral being living in a moral world taking responsibility for his actions. It is however disheartening to often hear that both in educational institutions and other sectors of the society vices such as corruption, bribery, examination malpractices, cultism, embezzlement of funds, tribalism, immorality, favoritism, etc. are carried out by individuals or groups with all sense of impunity. It is equally sad to note that many educated people are easily deceived thereby losing colossal sums of money and valuable resources and properties to fraudsters; many make costly mistakes by unknowingly believing and accepting fallacious arguments. All these unfortunate experiences have in turn led to some acts suicide, bankruptcy, willful homicide, enmity, face-offs, economic crises, divorce, sickness, and untimely deaths. It is equally obvious that in spite of the large number of polytechnic graduates produced annually, polytechnic education is yet to create the expected impact on Nigerians. The perennial technological underdevelopment, unemployment among polytechnic graduates, reliance on importation for quality products and services, corruption, imitation or production of fake products, inability to solve Nigeria's challenges like unemployment, insurgency, anti-social activities, unavailability of basic amenities like good water supply and electricity unequivocally demonstrates that the goals of polytechnic education categorically stated in the Nigerian Policy on Education have not been realized. All these unfortunate experiences could be predicated on the lack of knowledge of philosophy which is generally regarded as the love of wisdom.

The intention of this paper is to educate polytechnic students and the general public through the exposition of the nature and relevance of philosophy and its application to the Nigerian Polytechnic Education. To achieve this laudable objective the paper embarks on the following well-structured outline: definition of philosophy, structure of philosophy, definition of polytechnic education, goals of polytechnic education, philosophy and polytechnic education, conclusion, and recommendation.

### **Definition of Philosophy**

The term “philosophy” is a derivation of two Greek words “Philo” (love) and “Sophia” (wisdom) meaning “love of wisdom” c.f. Blackburn (1996 p. 286). Etymologically, Philosophy is defined as the ‘love of wisdom’. The term philosophy has been conceptually analyzed by various authors. Blackburn (1996 p.286) defines philosophy as the study of the most general and abstract features of the world and categories with which we think: mind, matter, reason, proof, truth etc. For him also in philosophy, the concepts with which we approach the world themselves become the topic of enquiry.

Jike (2005:1) says that philosophy revolves around man’s innate desire to comprehend his existential aspiration. He goes further to assert that central to a man’s understanding of the universe is his view on what it means “to be”. In his response to Bronowski’s definition of philosophy as a systematic reflection on human beings and the world they inhabit (Bronowski 1973) taken from Mordi and Jike, (2005:1), he goes further to assert that philosophy provided an epistemological insight into the purported orderliness and coherence that is achievable in the society. Macquarie, (1982) quoted from Enuwosa (2000) ed p.3) defines philosophy as the rational and critical investigation of problems and issues in life with a view to sorting out and clarifying the language and logic of questions and statements. For Enuwosa (2000 ed p.3) this implies that philosophy is an effort by man to analyze issues, clarify and explain the meaning and content of things. For him philosophy consists of speculation on matters in which definite knowledge are not ascertained. Enuwosa (2000 ed p. 3) pointed out that Orocka discussing Russell said that philosophy “consists of speculation on matters as to which definite knowledge has far been unascertainable, but... appeals to human reasons rather than authority”.

Furthermore Odera Oruka quoted from Enomah, (2016:16) defines philosophy “As a free investigation of the first principles of human life that is most fundamental which underlie human life”. Enuwosa (2000 ed p.3) says that clear and cogent answer to the question “what is philosophy?” rests on the definition of philosophy as the effort of man to achieve organized view of himself and the universe in which he lives. For him therefore, the philosopher is the person who perceives in some measure the ways in which the various experiences and awareness of existence from a pattern of meaning.

The above definitions of philosophy point to the fact that philosophy is the search for truth about reality. Truth and wisdom are concepts that are synonymous and interchangeable in their connotations. Hence, if philosophy is a search for wisdom in its etymological sense, then, philosophy indisputably is essentially the search for truth, truth which refers to correspondence of statements or propositions to reality. Truth of propositions in any argument leads to its validity and ultimately its soundness. Philosophy therefore in its search for truth entails the search for truthfulness of propositions, validity and soundness of arguments. This is the wisdom that philosophical enquiries are disparate to attain.

From the foregoing, it is quite obvious that philosophy is an activity of man characterized by knowledge, awareness, systematic reasoning, logico-critical thinking and reflection on reality and the objects of our experience in order to solve basic problems of life. Although, objectively speaking, it does not necessary imply that someone without the idea of philosophy is incapable of generating good, salient or relevant ideas or lacks common sense, but the knowledge of philosophy equips us with the techniques and nuances of reasoning and of arriving at most reliable knowledge of truth and of shaping and reshaping one’s attitude towards life and also at making more reasonable decisions for the wellbeing of oneself and of the entire society. Philosophy helps in the ethical, logical, epistemological and metaphysical evaluation and assessment of the implications of one’s attitude and decisions towards life in general, and the entire development of the society.

### **Structure of Philosophy**

Hornby (2005: 1468) describes structure as the way in which the parts of something are connected together, arranged or organized or a particular arrangement of the parts. Therefore, structure of philosophy can be defined as the division of philosophy or the various parts that make up the discipline called "philosophy". In a nutshell the structure of philosophy refers to the division of philosophy. Philosophy can be divided into four major parts namely; metaphysics, logic, axiology, and epistemology.

**Metaphysics:** Kalusi (1996: 6) describes metaphysics to mean things "beyond the physical realm" or things beyond the senses. For her, such concepts as soul, mind, spirit, heaven, hell, etc. fall within the scope of metaphysics, and its major concern is within the nature of ultimate reality. From the above, metaphysics can be seen as the discipline that examines the nature of reality and the components of reality, namely; man, universe, world of nature and immaterial or aspects of philosophy. Metaphysics is divided into cosmology and ontology. While cosmology is the study of the universe or for Mercier (1953: 45) the philosophic study of the inorganic world, ontology is the philosophy of being, the very fact of being, the very nature of existence and what makes existence. The Catholic Encyclopedia (1913) quoted cited in Enomah (1997:4) defines metaphysics as the portion of philosophy which treats the most general and fundamental principles underlying all reality and knowledge. For Enowosa (2000), metaphysics is a Greek word, meta-Physika meaning things beyond the physical, it probes into the nature of ultimate reality, it studies the totality of reality, and it elucidates the quality of the primordial substance. Enomah (2016:40) opines that metaphysics goes beyond the physical to inquire into the ultimate and fundamental basic nature of reality or things generally, i.e. what nature is in itself.

**Axiology:** Enomah (2016:44) describes axiology as a philosophical discipline that sets the norms for assessing the value of human conduct and the value of human artifact (products of human activity) norms, standard rules with which to judge values. Axiology deals with values in two parts namely ethics and aesthetics. Blackburn (1996:126) defines ethics as the study of the concepts involved in practical reasoning; good, right, duty, obligation, virtue, freedom, rationality, choice. Ethics can be defined as the aspect of philosophy that deals with value of human conduct - good and bad behaviour, moral or immoral i.e. from the teleological perspective. Aesthetics deal with the values of human artifacts i.e. appreciation of works of arts-beautiful or ugly. Blackburn (1996:8) defines aesthetics as the study of feelings, concepts, and judgments arising from our appreciation of the arts or the wider class of objects considered moving, or beautiful, or sublime. Aesthetics generally is the science or study of beauty.

**Logic:** Nyong (1996:67) describes logic as the study of the methods and laws used to distinguish correct reasoning from reasoning that is faulty., and Copi and Cohen (1978) quoted from Enomah (2002:1) sees logic as the study of the methods and principles used to distinguish correct reasoning from incorrect reasoning. Bello (2000:1) defines logic as the study of the principles and techniques of distinguishing good arguments from bad arguments. From the foregoing, logic can be defined as the science of reasoning which uses reasoning in the process of acquisition of knowledge; it is the study of the principles and techniques of distinguishing valid from invalid arguments and from sound and unsound arguments for the purpose of attaining truth which is the yardstick and principle of knowledge.

**Epistemology:** Nyong (1996:7) describes epistemology as the theory of knowledge concerned with knowledge as a whole, ranging from the sources of knowledge, the grounds in which an aspect of knowledge may be held to be true or false, the relationship between knowledge and belief, or knowledge and truth. For him, epistemology is also an enquiry into the nature of knowledge, truth and certainty. Similarly, Blackburn (1996:123) sees epistemology as the theory of knowledge, and that its central questions include the origin of knowledge; the place of experience in generating knowledge, and the place of reason in doing so; the relationship between knowledge and certainty, and between knowledge and the impossibility of error; the possibility of universal skepticism; and the changing forms of knowledge that arise from new conceptualizations of the world. Epistemology can therefore be defined or described as the theoretico-philosophical science that studies the nature and extent of human knowledge; it seeks the certitude of knowledge, and criticizes in order to find out whether our knowledge or propositions corresponds with reality; it questions the truth-value of knowledge or propositions and the sources of our knowledge.

### **Philosophical Methods**

The researcher adopts four philosophical methods in this research. These methods are speculative, prescriptive, analytic and phenomenology.

**Speculative Method:** This is a method of philosophizing on issues of general interest. Speculation is achieved by expressing individual opinion or view on a particular issue or statement. Hornby (2005:1416) defines speculation as the act of forming opinion about what has happened or what might happen without knowing all the facts. According to Kalusi (1996:4) speculative method is a way of thinking systematically about everything that exists. Speculative philosophers are curious to see things as a whole. They want to know how all the different things that have been discovered form some sort of meaningful totality. Speculative philosophy is therefore an attempt to search for order and wholeness relating to knowledge and experience. This method is used in explaining the nature of the objectives and the curriculum of polytechnic education.

**Prescriptive Method:** Blackburn (1996:299) describes prescriptivism as the approach to moral theory especially associated with Hare, that assimilates moral commitment to the giving or accepting of command. It is the act of telling people what should be done or what should not be done. This method is a technique of philosophizing, which lays down standards or criteria for a concept or issue. This method is employed when the researcher made recommendations as a vital aspect of this research.

**Analytic Method:** Analysis, for Blackburn (1996:14) refers to the process of breaking a concept down into simple parts, so that its logical structure is displayed. For Hornby (2005:47), analysis means a careful examination of a word in order to find out what it consists. The researcher used the analytic method to analyze basic concepts in this research. The purpose is to tackle misconception and improved communication. The method is used by the researcher to analyze various concepts in the definition of terms and concepts used by various philosophers.

**Phenomenology:** For Blackburn (1996:284), phenomenology is a term that emerged in the 18th Century, in the writings of Joham Heinrich Lambert (1728 – 77) and Kant, to denote the description of consciousness and experience in abstraction from consideration of its intention or content. This method is applied by the researcher in analyzing opinions or ideas propounded by different authors. In this method, the researcher analyzed and speculated on ideas, notions and opinions of philosophers per se irrespective of their religious affiliations or social status. In other words the researcher is not influenced by the personality of proponents in analyzing their philosophical ideas. This method is applied in analyzing and discussing the opinions and ideas of philosophers in this research.

### **Definition of Polytechnic Education**

In order to explain the term “Polytechnic Education”, it is necessary to know the definitions of “Polytechnic” and “Education”.

**Polytechnic:** The tern “polytechnic” originated from the word “poly” which means many, Hornby (2005:1124) defines the word “polytechnic” as a college for higher education, especially in scientific and technical subjects. The term “technical” in the definition is very important and crucial in the sense that technical education primarily has to do with utmost diligent manipulation of tools to accomplish specific scientific task, although polytechnic education has been extended to include or embrace social sciences like Banking and Finance, Mass Communication, Political Science etc. In fact, some Polytechnics have been elevated to the status of awarding B. Tech degrees in Nigeria. Certificate courses such as diplomas in Law, French, etc. can also be offered by polytechnics.

**Education:** The term education has been subjected to varied definitions. Hogan (2006:135) sees education as the transmission of knowledge by either formal or informal methods. Others who have attempted the definition of education include Briggs (1930), Jeffery (1946), Whitehead (1962), Peters (1963), Elliot (1968), Taiwo (1981), Ukeje (1966), Datta (1984), etc., all cited in Itedjere (2007 pp1-3). Itedjere (2007 pp1-3) citing Jeffery (1946) refers to education as “The direct means by which a people seeks to shape its own destiny and to transform itself from what it knows itself to be into it would hope to become.” From this understanding, education can be defined as the impartation and internalization of

values and skills that make one to be functional in the society, and for maximum self-fulfillment, proficiency and productivity.

**Polytechnic Education:** From the definitions of “Polytechnic” and “Education”, one can coin out a definition for “Polytechnic Education”. Polytechnic Education therefore, means the impartation and internalization of technical and scientific knowledge and skills to solve societal and environmental challenges, and for self-reliance and comfort. It is knowledge acquired for the enhancement of technological development and specialization.

### **Goals of Polytechnic Education**

According to the National Policy on Education (1998:34-35) some of the goals of Polytechnic Education include the following:

- i. provide full-time or part-time courses of instruction and training in engineering other technologies, applied science and management leading to the production of trained manpower;
- ii. provide the technological knowledge and skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development of Nigeria.
- iii. give training and impart the necessary skills for the production of technicians, technologists and other skilled personnel who shall be enterprising and self-reliant;
- iv. train people who can apply scientific knowledge to solve environmental problems for the convenience of man; and
- v. give exposure on professional studies in the technologies.

### **Philosophy and Polytechnic Education Curriculum**

The under-mentioned two courses and their respective goals and objectives as presented in the 1999 General Studies Course Specifications for National Diploma and Higher National Diploma are clues or highlights to the importance or values of philosophy in polytechnic education.

#### **Moral Philosophy (GNS 312)**

**Goal:** This course is intended to introduce the student to the importance of moral philosophical education in our national life. Its main aim is to make the student internalize the various elements of Moral Philosophy which will help build an “upright man” in order to accelerate national development ((1999) General Studies Course Specifications for National Diploma and Higher National Diploma (2008:101).

**Objectives:** On completion of this course, the student should: (1) understand the concept, dimensions, and purpose of moral philosophy (2) know the duties of man (3) know the rights of man in society (4) understand what is meant by virtues (5) know the agents responsible for the custody, teaching and enforcement of moral philosophical values (6) understand prevalent additional Nigerian philosophies (7) understand the importance of moral philosophy in building a disciplined society (1999) General Studies Course Specifications for National Diploma and Higher National Diploma (2008:101).

#### **Social Philosophy (GNS 321)**

**Goal:** This course is designed to enable students to understand the basic elements of Social Philosophy (1999) General Studies Course Specifications for National Diploma and Higher National Diploma (2008: 115).

**Objectives:** On completion of this course, students should be able to (1) know what is philosophy and its scope (2) know the nature of man, his place in the society and his capacity at speculation (3) know the philosophical basis for education in the Nigerian society (4) appreciate the rationale for the existence of the state (5) understand the philosophy behind the concept of justice and equity (1999) General Studies Course Specifications for National Diploma and Higher National Diploma (2008: 115).

From the foregoing the value of philosophy as a discipline that cultivates and forms the minds of students for critical thinking cannot be underestimated or underrated. A cultivated mind is a catalyst for the economic, educational, scientific, technological, religious, capital, human and infrastructural development of the society. The possibility of this depends on the understanding and application of philosophy.

### **Philosophy and Polytechnic Education**

Having critically and conceptually analyzed the nature of philosophy, the task before us is now to discuss the imperativeness of philosophy to polytechnic education. Here the researcher will apply the various branches of philosophy, namely: metaphysics, axiology, logic, and epistemology to polytechnic education.

**Metaphysics and Polytechnic Education:** Metaphysics has been seen as the science of abstract realities such as God, soul, existence, mind and what lies beyond what is visible or corporeal. Metaphysics raises our minds and knowledge to what lies beyond the visible world or incorporeal realities. The visible world is not everything that exists. There is life after death characterized by eternity and polarized into glory and punishment. How one spends eternity depends on what one does with his life here on earth. Metaphysics talks about heaven, hell, judgment, and immortality of the soul. These are concepts of life after death. Metaphysical knowledge therefore creates in our minds the fear of the unknown. One reaps what he sows – the law of karma. This therefore calls for sincerity, accountability, transparency, openness, and justice which are necessary ingredients of educational and societal development. Positive and objective approach to education and society underscores the indispensability of metaphysical understanding of life and metaphysical approach to life. While sincere and unmitigated approach to education and society in the areas of transparency, accountability, equity, equality, justice etc. affords one of eternal glory and rewards in life after death, vicious acts such as injustice, embezzlement of funds, marginalization, greed, insincerity towards education and society plunges one into eternal damnation in the life after death. The impact of metaphysics therefore consists in ensuring sanity in polytechnic educational institutions and in entire society.

**Axiology and Polytechnic Education:** Man is a moral being living in a moral world, and since man is a rational being, his actions have moral implications. By moral implication here I mean that man's actions deserve either praise or blame. While good actions of man are commended and rewarded, bad or evil actions are condemned and punished. A nation that is plagued with evils such as bribery and corruption cannot record any meaningful progress in education and society. On the other hand a society whose citizens are morally good and upright registers rapid development in education and society. This is where knowledge of ethical or moral philosophy cannot be overemphasized. As a catalyst and motivation for moral development and consciousness the polytechnic educational institutions and the society should device or improve on the machinery for an appraisal, reward or commendation of morally upright citizens or patriots. This will encourage or boost the spirit of patriotism of citizens in all ramifications.

For instance, awards, prizes, recognitions, promotions etc. should be given to those who excel morally. On the same vain, the machinery for checking and discouraging morally evil actions such as bribery and corruption should be created or enhanced upon. For instance, the SSS, the Police and other law enforcement agencies should be brought to high standard and made sophisticated to successfully combat and annihilate criminality and other vices in the polytechnic educational institutions and the entire society. In addition, corrupt personalities should be well punished either by imprisonment, dismissal or suspension to serve as deterrents for others and to sanitize the polytechnic education and the society. Similarly, students should be taught the knowledge of appreciation of aesthetics or beauty. In this regard, town planners, contractors, and real estate managers should know the value of beauty in societal development. In general dressing codes and appearance and social etiquettes and policies should be formulated and passed into law to enhance modesty in appearance in polytechnic educational institutions.

**Epistemology and Polytechnic Education:** Epistemology is the science and theory of knowledge. Varieties of knowledge are required in the Nigerian educational system. Of course, knowledge is derived from every field of knowledge or department. In addition to these, knowledge is also acquired outside the walls of the formal education such as through advice, suggestions, research, reflections, abstraction, intuition, investigation, interrogations, counseling, revelation, vision, etc. in order to embark on a project or solve a problem. The knowledge of epistemology helps individual to ascertain, verify, and access the source and the truth-value of such information in order to arrive at a deeper insight for the purpose of making more meaningful decisions. The lack of knowledge of epistemology has made a lot of people fall prey or become victims of fraudsters. One with the knowledge of epistemology searches for more genuine

knowledge through asking questions, investigations, examinations, reflection, research, verification in order not to be deceived or cajoled into partaking in antisocial activities such as cultism, prostitution, examination malpractice, etc. by fallacious arguments from fellow students or staff on a campus.

**Logic and Polytechnic Education:** Logic is the science of reasoning. It helps to distinguish valid from invalid arguments, sound from unsound argument. The understanding of logic is very important for all polytechnic students in order for them to create impact on education and society. There are lots of statements and ideas which do not correspond to reality. There are ideas which do not have any bearing with issues at hand. When fallacious arguments with false propositions are considered or accepted, they destroy education and society. In most cases they are accepted due to ignorance of the principles of logic or due to fear of personalities involved. In this case both the one who make fallacious arguments and the one who accept them commit logical fallacies. This leads to mutual collapse or fall of education and society.

### CONCLUSION

The general notion of philosophy as the “love of wisdom” and the discipline that cultivates the mind is demonstrated in the course of the analysis of the nature of philosophy and its application to the Nigeria Polytechnic Educational system in this paper. Wisdom rules the world. Knowledge and expertise devoid of wisdom would amount to retardation of societal technological, economic, political, social, and religious developments and eventual collapse of the society. The above discourse or finding makes it very clear that the acquisition of knowledge of philosophy is necessary in the Nigeria Polytechnic Education.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

With the understanding of the values of philosophy in the polytechnic education, this paper makes the following recommendations:

- i. philosophy should be made compulsory in the Nigeria Polytechnic Education; and in polytechnics where it is already taken, it should be encouraged and emphasized;
- ii. qualified lecturers in philosophy should be employed to teach philosophy in the Nigerian Polytechnic Educational system;
- iii. conferences, seminars, and workshops on the importance of philosophy should be frequently organized in respective polytechnics for both staff and students in order to create the knowledge of philosophy in all. Similar conferences should also be organized for public workers, politicians, government agencies, and stakeholders; and
- iv. philosophy education should be made compulsory in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

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