



Epistemology and Polytechnic Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Today a lot of Polytechnic students are faced with problems of parochialism, myopia, rash decision, compounding and complication of their existing problems. This is due to their deficiency in the knowledge of epistemology. The purpose of this paper is to expose polytechnic students to the understanding of the rudiments of epistemology which underscores the speculative understanding of objects of study in polytechnic education. The deficiency of the speculative nature of knowledge of realities in polytechnic education makes polytechnic students to understand their objects of study from just one dimension or perspective. The study reveals that the study of epistemology will enable polytechnic students to understand the nature, sources, theories, and criteria of knowledge. The paper concludes that the knowledge of epistemology will unambiguously benefit polytechnic students in dimensions of annihilation of parochialism, eradication of myopia, easier and reliable solutions to problems, and avoidance of rash conclusions and decisions. The methodology employed in this study includes analysis, prescription, application, and speculation. The paper recommends that the study of epistemology should be introduced and made compulsory in all Nigerian polytechnics.

Keywords: Epistemology, Knowledge, Truth, Skeptism, Revelation, Reason

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge has a speculative characteristic. This speculative nature of knowledge of reality is deficient in polytechnic education thereby making polytechnic students to understand things from just one dimension or perspective, and their application of a single world view plunges them into problems of parochialism, myopia, rash decision and conclusion, and compounding and complication their exiting problems. All these unequivocally indicate the lack of knowledge of epistemology among polytechnic students which studies the nature, sources, theories, and criteria of knowledge. This paper is directed towards exposing polytechnic students to the understanding of the rudiments of epistemology that will help them in different ways especially in areas of annihilation of parochialism, eradication of myopia, easier and reliable solutions to problems, and avoidance of rash conclusions and decisions. To achieve this creditable feat, the paper embarks on a well articulated outline which include introduction, definition of epistemology, definition of knowledge, ways of knowing, types of knowledge, theories of truth, criteria of knowledge, epistemology and polytechnic education, conclusion, and recommendation.

Definition of Epistemology

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy, and etymologically, it is derived from the Greek word *episteme*, knowledge cf. Blackburn (1996, p.123). From etymological derivation, the term epistemology can be defined as the study or theory of knowledge. As regard its origin, epistemology "... is said to have originated about the same time that man became aware of his existence and his place in nature. That is, his relationship with the objects and events in nature" cf. Nelson, Oshevire, and Esegbue in A. A. Mordi & V. T. Jike (2005, ed. p. 27). Historically, philosophers have defined epistemology in different ways, although with a common denominator. Oroka (1990, p. 6) said that epistemology "...deals with the problem of knowledge. It conducts enquiry into the nature, and ground of experience, belief and knowledge. It asks such questions as 'what can we know?' 'How we do know it?' 'How do we know that we know it?'" Okpetu in Oroka, et al (1999 p. 8) opined that epistemology is "The theory of knowledge...It involves such issues as what we can know, how we can know, the justification of our knowledge and other related issues which include whether reason alone or the sense alone can supply

knowledge”. This definition spells out the spells objects of epistemology, namely, the formal object (methodology) and the material object (scope) of epistemology when he postulated concerning epistemology that “This branch of philosophy deals with three areas of inquiry, namely, the means by which we acquire knowledge, the scope of our knowledge, and the criteria by which we judge the validity or reliability of our knowledge. The utmost concern of the epistemologist is whether (certain) knowledge is possible and justification for any claim to knowledge” cf. Okpetu in Oroka, et al (1999 p. 8). Nyong (1996 p.7) also has formulated a definition for epistemology. For him, it is “... 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. It is an enquiry into the nature of knowledge, truth and certainty”. Similarly, Blackburn (1996 .p123) brings into focus the nature and essence of epistemology when he viewed epistemology as “The theory of knowledge. 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 *scepticism*; and the changing forms of knowledge that arise from new conceptualizations of the world. All of these issues link with other central corns of philosophy such as the nature of truth and the nature of experience and meaning”.

The Encyclopedia of Philosophy cited by Nyong (1996 p.18) says that “Epistemology, or theory of knowledge, is that branch of philosophy which is concerned with the nature and scope f knowledge, its presuppositions and basis, and the general reliability of claims to knowledge”. Nyong (1996 .18) went further to explain that epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with three areas of inquiry, namely, the means by which we acquire knowledge, the scope of our knowledge, and the criteria by which we judge the validity of reliability of our knowledge, and that the utmost concern of the epistemologist is whether (certain) knowledge is possible and the justification for any claim to knowledge. Enomah (2018 p.27) described epistemology 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.

Definition of Knowledge

The variables in the definition of knowledge are already contained in the definition of epistemology which is theory of knowledge. But for profound and clearer understanding, Hornby (2005 p.821) defined knowledge as the information, understanding and skill that you gain through education or experience; the state of knowing about a particular fact or situation. From this definition it can be seen that knowledge entails understanding, acquaintance or familiarity with an object of knowledge or of subject matter under scrutiny. This is a general or common understanding of knowledge. However this paper will embark on philosophical definition of knowledge through the conceptual analysis of its various dimensions, namely, the criteria, sources, theories, scope, and justification.

Sources (Categories) of Knowledge

Knowledge, depending on its source, can be classified as follows:

Divine Revelation (Revealed Knowledge): Hornby (2005 ed p. 1252) defined revelation as a fact that people are made aware of, especially one that has been secret and is surprising, the act of making people aware of something that has been secret, something that is considered to be a sign or message from God, to be a completely new or surprising experience; to be different from what was expected. The adjective ‘Divine’ that precedes the noun ‘Revelation’ is suggestive of God or connected with God cf. Honrby (2005 ed p. 428) indicative of ‘Divine Revelation’ as an unmitigated enlightenment i.e. without any aorta of human intervention, effort or contribution. Divine Revelation can occur through various media such as dreams, physical celestial or cosmic signs (clouds, earthquakes, wind, oracles, divination, etc), inspiration, vision, ecstasy, etc. Contents of Divine Revelation have been recorded in religious books for posterity and for religious purposes especially for religious education and spirituality. Examples of such religious books include the Holy Bible, the Holy Koran, the Bhagavad-Gita and Upanishad. Enuwosa in

Oroka (2000 ed p.9) in demonstrating this vividly said that “The Christian and Jewish religions have their own divine inspired or revealed knowledge contained in the Holy Bible. The Muslims have theirs in the Holy Koran and the Hindus have theirs in Bhagavad-Gita and Upanishad”. Although philosophers raised arguments as regards the authenticity of Divine Revelation in the dimensions of its source, documentation, and interpretation cf. Oroka (1990 p. 17), the contents of Divine Revelation contain truths or knowledge with universal implication significance. They contain moral axioms that regulate moral actions of everyone; they also contain moral imperatives to which every action must align with or conform to. The problem associated with revelation lies in conflicting contents of revelation on a particular issue. For example polygamy is rejected by the Bible, but approved by Koran. Yet the contents of both books are revealed by God.

Intuitionism (Intuitive Knowledge): Blackburn (1996 p.197) defined intuition as “Immediate awareness, either of the truth of some proposition, or of an object of apprehension such a concept. Awareness of the passage of time, or of the ineffable nature of God, have equally been claimed as intuitions”. Intuition is a sudden rush of truth or knowledge into the mind. Like Divine Revelation, intuition is neither preceded nor is it articulated by any intimation i.e. there no clue to its acquisition. It is an unexpected insight or awareness that bursts into human intellect. However, intuition presupposes the existence for a considerable period of time a teething problem that has defied solutions. Continuous engagement of the mind in contemplation and thinking may pay off in acquiring intuitive knowledge, although thinking are not necessary prerequisites or roadmaps to intuitive knowledge since intuitive occurs reflexively. Contemplation and meditation only keep the mind or the intellect active. Kneller (1871) cited by Oroka (1990 p.17) said that intuition is “is the sudden eruption into consciousness of an idea or conclusion produced by a long process of unconscious work”. Intellectually intuitive knowledge is very necessary and useful. For instance, it is “...necessary in all great intellectual achievements. Hypotheses, scientific theories, and works of art, all generate from some primary intuition and later elaborated and refined. The problem-solving approach to the teaching-learning process generates primary intuition in the learner. Since intuitive knowledge is the imaginative vision or private experience of the person proposing it, it is most relevant in creative arts, music, essay writing and autobiographies” cf. Oroka (1990 pp.17-18). The problem associated with intuition lies in various people having conflicting intuitive knowledge on a particular issue or problem. For instance, one may have the intuition that abortion is the solution to unwanted pregnancy, but another may have intuition that keeping the pregnancy and saving the life of the baby is solution to the same problem.

Reasoning (Rational Knowledge: For Blackburn (1996 p.320) “Any process of drawing a conclusion from set of premises may be called a process of reasoning. If the conclusion concerns what to do, the process is called practical reasoning, otherwise pure or theoretical reasoning”. Reasoning or rational knowledge for Kalusi (1996 p.13) is a “...type of knowledge ...acquired through the exercise of reasoning alone. For example, one starts with a premise or statement, and links it up with other premises or statements in a logical manner in order to arrive at a conclusion”. Similarly, according to Ekarika (1986 p.32) “Reasoning is another source of knowledge. We reason when we take certain statements and make one or more statements i.e. when we use certain statements to infer others. (a) We do this by DEDUCTION by which we draw the conclusion from one or more statements (premises). This conclusion follows logically from the given premises...In such reasoning we need not refer to the veracity of the premise to determine the truth of the conclusion (REASONING) but apply the rules of Logic... (b) We can also apply INDUCTION by examining all the cases (PREMISES) one by one since we do not hold them as providing complete evidence. This is a process of reasoning by which we pass from particular cases to general or Universal conclusions”.

Example of Deductive Reasoning

- All men have Souls (Major Premise)
- Ebube is a man (Minor Premise)
- Therefore Ebube has a Soul (Conclusion)

Example of Inductive Reasoning

Mary has a womb
Jane has a womb
Therefore all girls have wombs

For Kalusi (1996 p.13) “Rational knowledge, unlike the empirical knowledge is not based on experiments or observation. Rather, it is purely rooted in logical reasoning”. For Oroka (1990 p.18) “Rational knowledge is generally abstract and formal. It deals with logical relations and meaning not specifically applicable to anything”. The difficulty in reasoning as a source of knowledge is its inflexibility as it does not accommodate subjectivity and feeling, although it is very useful in the study of arts and sciences. Concerning the problems and relevance of reasoning, Oroka (1990 p.18) stated that it lacks both the emotional states of affairs inherent in intuitive knowledge and the actuality found in empirical knowledge. However, it underlies all great studies in both arts and sciences, nowadays”.

Authoritarianism (Authoritative Knowledge): Hornby (2005 ed p.84) defined authority as “ The power to give orders to people...the power to or right to do something” while the term ‘authoritative’ means “1 showing that you expect people to obey and respect you...2 that you can trust and respect as true” cf. Hornby (2005 ed p.84). Ekarika (1986 p.33) “We can also know from the authority of another agent .g. students know because they are taught by professors etc; what they know is invoked by the authority of their Masters who are reputed to be knowledgeable. We also know because we read it from books which command the authority of the authors, or someone has said it etc. A child knows because the mother taught it”. For Oroka (1990 p.18) Authoritative knowledge is “...knowledge that we accept on the authority of others. It saves us time and enables us to concentrate on other matters”. Similarly, Isiramen in Oroka and Isiramen (1993 p.7) also opined that Authoritative Knowledge is that “...kind of knowledge which is derived from outside agency. To acquire knowledge in this vein, the individual has to rely on this agency and accept whatever he teaches or proclaims. Examples of such agencies are the church, the state, the family, the culture, or the expert”. As regards the imperativeness of Authoritative Knowledge Oroka (1990 .19) stated that “Authoritative knowledge is used in all subjects, mainly as a supplement, to other processes of learning”. For Isiramen in Oroka and Isiramen (1993 p.7) “There are wide range of criticism on authoritative knowledge. The dependence on the authority of tradition or culture for instance, is dangerous and cannot account for the emergence of new knowledge. Furthermore to rely on the opinion of majority in the derivation of knowledge cannot also help in advancement of knowledge because only few people are often involved in the discovering of new knowledge. Moreover, we cannot also rely on an expert because we cannot be sure that what the expert is saying is true. All fields of knowledge are engulfed in internal controversies and new and different interpretations. For Ekarika (1986 p.33) also “All this is valid knowledge but it all depends on the validity of the knowledge of the agent”.

Empiricism (Empirical/Sense Knowledge): According to Blackburn (1996 p.119) empiricism is “The permanent strand in philosophy that attempts to tie knowledge to experience. Experience is thought of either as the sensory contents of consciousness, or as whatever is expressed in some designated class of statements that can be observed to be true by the use of the senses. Empiricism denies that there is any knowledge outside this class or at last outside whatever is given by legitimate theorizing on the basis of this class”. Ekarika (1986 p.31) referred to empirical knowledge as perception when he gave an elucidatory explanation of it saying that “We know by our five senses. This is empirical knowledge. I know this book because I can see it, touch it, etc. This is the way we know the physical world and things – by seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. This is knowledge by PERCEPTION”. For Oroka (1996 p.18) also empirical knowledge is knowledge that is confirmed by the evidence of the senses. The senses of hearing, seeing, smelling, feeling, and tasting are fundamental to the acquisition of concepts of the world around us. The facts got from sensory experiences help us to form concepts or ideas”. The weakness or error associated with empirical knowledge is not predicated on the objects of experience but on the sensory faculties that “...may sometimes deceive us, as when a driver thinks that there is water in front of him, on the road” cf. Oroka (1996 p.18) but it is just a mirage. Ekarika (1986 p.31) in remarking on weakness of empirical knowledge said that “If we make a mistake so that what we think we know is

not in fact the thing, this may be a perceptual error arising from a defect in our senses but it is not because our senses are infallible, but they can be defective. Our error comes from wrong judgment not from our sensations, for when we discover the error later on, it is still the senses which have discovered it all the same. Our senses haven't really led us into error".

Having examined the various sources or ways of knowing, it is necessary to understand that what is paramount and imperative is the manifestation of the valid basis to knowledge acquired from the sources rather than the legitimacy of the knowledge. Ekarika (1986 p.34) alluded to this when stated that "What is important is not the source and authenticity of that knowledge. All do admit that these sources are there. We do not grow more knowledgeable simply by claiming to employ all these sources, but rather by demonstrating that what we have acquired therefrom are valid foundations to the acquisition of knowledge".

Criteria of Knowledge

Scheffler (1978) cited by Oroka (1990 p.14) says that to know, there are three conditions that must be fulfilled, namely, truth, evidence, and belief.

Truth Condition: According to Blackburn (1996 p.381) "The Truth condition of a statement is the condition the world must meet if the statement is to be true. To know this condition is equivalent to knowing the meaning of the statement". Truth therefore is a necessary condition for knowledge. The truth condition implies that if one claims to have knowledge of a thing, he cannot be mistaken about it. This is due to the fact that knowledge implies commitment to truth of statement. This is why Oroka (1990 p.15) opined that "knowledge therefore strongly agrees with truth, and is incompatible with wrong or mistaken".

Belief Condition: To believe a proposition is to hold it to be true. To claim to have knowledge X one must have belief in X. Therefore knowledge implies belief. In other words knowledge is incompatible doubt. For one to claim to know God he must believe in God. Objections or criticisms have been raised on belief as a condition for knowledge. Oroka (1990 p.16) said that "However, belief alone is generally not considered as equivalent to knowledge. It is usually regarded as a lower order form of knowledge, which, by itself, does not constitute knowledge, no matter how strong the belief condition is". In regard to problem of belief, Blackburn (1996 p.40) opined that "The philosophical problems include discovering whether belief differs from other varieties of assent, such as acceptance, discovering to what extent degrees of belief are possible, understanding the ways in which belief is controlled by rational and irrational factors, and discovering its links with other properties, such as the possession of conceptual or linguistic skills".

Evidence Condition: Honrby (2005 ed p.502) defines evidence as "...the facts, signs or objects that make you believe that something is true". From the definition it is quite clear that evidence as a condition for knowledge entails verification, substantiation, confirmation, justification, authentication, or proof of proposition or object of knowledge one claims to have. This implies that to claim to know something one must be certain to have the knowledge of that thing through verification and substantiation. Evidence condition is far more than belief because it entails the building up and application acceptable standards. For Oroka (1990 p.15) "The evidence condition intends to show more precisely the idea that knowing in the 'strong sense' is more than just true belief. This the ability to justify or back up the belief in a manner appropriate to the situation. It shows that knowing is not simply a matter of words, but the ability to confront the reality represented by the words....Adequacy in this evidence condition implicitly refers to 'standards'. It is not just any evidence, but 'acceptable evidence'". The problem with the evidence condition lies in the variation in age of the one who claims to know, the cultural background, and the application of standards with are more apt or suitable in some situations than others. Hence in regard to the deficiencies of the evidence condition, Oroka (1990 p.15) pointed out that "...the notion of adequacy involves standards which are more strictly applied in some cases, and more approximately in others. We also stated that evidence or standard vary with age and culture. All these factors give rise to multiple interpretations of 'knowing'".

Theories of Truth

Another very crucial and indispensable segment in the whole issue of knowledge in epistemology is truth. Hornby (2005 ed p.1586-1587) described truth as "...the quality or state of being based on fact". This definition is a demonstration that truth is a necessary requirement or ground for knowledge. Here the theories of truth will be presented as necessary predicates or roadmaps to asserting, claiming, or accepting any proposition or statement as a piece of knowledge. The theories of truth include the correspondence theory, the consistency theory, and the pragmatic theory cf Oroka (1990 p.12). It is imperative to know that "All the theory of knowledge is developed as a defence against skeptics who believe that it is impossible for man to know a thing" cf Kalusi (1996 p.13).

The Correspondence Theory of Truth: The word 'correspondence' refers to a connection between two things; the fact of two things being similar cf. Hornby (2005 ed p.328). The truth referred to here is metaphysical truth, an objective or idealistic truth, an external reality which exists in the world of forms independent of human perception. In fact Blackburn (1996 p.84) opined that "...a correspondence theory is not simply the view that truth consists in correspondence with facts, but rather the view that it is theoretically interesting to realize this". This in contrast to Aristotle's view that "...a statement is true if it says of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not" cf Blackburn (1996 p.84). For Oroka (1990 p.13) "This theory proceeds on the ontological view that there is an objective world independent of human perception. The pupil learns the truth when his ideas or impressions correspond to this external reality". This theory has been criticised on the ground of the remoteness, inaccessibility, and obscurity of the external truths or realities from the world of physical world and from human intellect. What is, is external to the body, and eternally true. It can only be conceived by the mind that thinks, perceives and interprets meanings, because it is closer or 'discover' the truth, in the sense of removing or cutting through the cover of ignorance or misunderstanding which made its location obscure, during the period of research" cf For Oroka (1990 p.13).

The Consistency Theory: Consistency refers to the quality of always behaving in the same way or of having the same opinions, standard, etc cf Hornby (2005 ed p.310). Since this definition necessarily demonstrates that consistency as a *conditio sine qua non* for the establishment of the veracity of any propositions or statements, the consistency theory is developed as a theory of truth, and indeed of knowledge. For Oroka (1990 p.13), the theory of truth has two dimensions, namely, reliability and objectivity. "To researchers, experimental or test results are 'reliable' if successive impressions of the same investigator are consistent with each other, that is, if he gets the same result from different tests and experiments, using the same condition. They are 'objective' if the impressions of different investigators, operating under the same experimental conditions are consistent with each other" cf Oroka (1990 p.13).

Pragmatic Theory: Pragmatism according to Blackburn (1996 p.297) is "The philosophy of meaning and truth especially associated with Pierce and James. Pragmatism is given various formulations by both writers, but the core is the belief that the meaning of a doctrine is the same as the practical effect of adopting it". Pragmatism emphasizes the pre-eminence of usefulness and positive impacts or consequences of propositions and statements on others or on the society. Here the truth of any knowledge is determined by its practical usefulness. For Oroka (1990 p.13) "...the pragmatic theory maintains that the meaning of truth of anything is found in its consequences". Therefore knowledge is regarded as such if it creates positive impacts on the environment. The pragmatic theory of truth is "The view associated especially with James, that the truth of a statement can be defined in terms of the utility of accepting it" cf Blackburn (1996 p.297).

Epistemology and Polytechnic Education

From the elucidatory conceptual analysis of the nature of epistemology, it is evidently vivid that the importance of epistemology cannot be underestimated. Some of the values of epistemology to polytechnic students include the following.

Annihilation of Parochialism: Parochialism refers to the attitude of concerning oneself with small issues that happen in one's local area and not interested in more important cf. Hornby (2005 d p.1060). According to Kalusi (1996 p.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. This therefore helps to reduce and even annihilate parochialism which is a display of immaturity in handling of crucial issues among polytechnic students. Some polytechnic students place all emphasis, value or importance one thing thereby neglecting other very important aspects of life and activities. For instance, some students place overwhelming devotedness to studies by relegate to the background other activities such as regular sports or games, spirituality or religiosity, social activities. They fail to understand that education does not only consist in academic activities but also should embrace social, spiritual, and physical activities. These students may be academically sound and excellent but very socially, spiritually, and religiously defective. In this case they become half-backed graduates. Epistemological knowledge will help polytechnic students to acquire holistic education.

Eradication of Myopia: Some polytechnic students are myopic in their approach to issues and in looking at realities around them. They accept thing at their face values; they look at appearances. They are carried away by what they see without considering what they are. They are deceived into membership of secret cults, lured into *yahooism*, *vudism*, and other social vices. In other words they are naive because they exhibit one-sided understanding and appreciation of things and in issues. This makes them to be immature in their reasoning and presentations. The study of epistemology will enable polytechnic students know and appreciate other ways of accessing reality which results in having diverse understanding and implication of given reality or issue. It will help them to critically assess the views of others on a particular matter, thereby eradicating the problem of myopia on campus.

Easier and Reliable Solutions to Problems: Polytechnic students are constantly confronted with daunting problems on campus; problems relating to finance, academics, relationship, friendship, morality, family, cultism, etc. are not uncommon. Many polytechnic students make their problems perennial because they are unable to find permanent solutions to them. These problems eventually engulf students plunging them into frustrations and devastation. Problems of polytechnic students persist because of the inability of the students to tackled them from different dimensions since they have no knowledge of others methods. The knowledge of epistemology will help students to acquire the knowledge of other ways of looking, understanding, and dealing with challenges, and this will enable them to discover easier and reliable ways of solving various problems on campus. This is because the various ways of knowing studied in epistemology are different ways of solving a particular problem.

Avoidance of Rash Decisions: Many polytechnic students compound and complicate their problems due to rash decisions they make as a result of the knowledge of only one way of understanding reality and the only one way of dealing with issues. Applying and taking decisions based on the only one single knowledge which may not work, plummet and tumble them into more difficult problems. But the study of epistemology enables students to apply alternative methods in handling challenges in order to avoid rash decisions which produce additional and more severe difficulties.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of nature of epistemology indisputably reveals that acquisition of the complete knowledge of a particular subject matter or object and the solution to a problem may not be limited to one angle but multidimensional. Epistemology which is the theory of knowledge presents the various ways of acquiring knowledge and of understanding a particular reality. The various ways of knowing is the speculative insight into a particular reality. The understanding of reality through the different ways of knowing studied in epistemology is unequivocally relevant to polytechnic students in areas of annihilation of parochialism, eradication of myopia, easier and reliable solutions to problems, and avoidance of rash decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the relevant of epistemology to polytechnic education, the paper makes the following recommendations.

1. The study of Epistemology should be introduced and made compulsory in all Nigeria Polytechnics.

2. Qualified staff should be employed to teach epistemology in Nigeria polytechnics.
3. Counselling services, department, or unit should be provided, equipped and developed to help students in tackling their various educational, emotional, academic, and other related challenges.

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