

A CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF IDEALIST PHILOSOPHY AND ITS BEARING ON
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

BY

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Abstract

The paper examined a conceptual clarification of idealist philosophy and its bearing on the early childhood education. The clarification is based on the three dimensional elements of philosophy such as metaphysics (reality), epistemology (knowledge and axiology (values). These are the facilitators of skills developments in all human beings. The clarification further premised on that fact that children minds are always active and attracted towards all things that they come across within their surroundings. This becomes necessary because, education needs to focus on the philosophy of self-realization to deliver the good life its purported in all society. The idealist philosophy is the most suitable because it explains how children can be helped or assisted to acquire the goal of self realization gradually. This is based on the fact that the early childhood education is all embracing as it focuses on the critical development of children to acquire some developmental skills and concepts during stipulated period of time. The skills they facilitate includes, identification counting, recitation as well as other-social emotional skills to the beginning of numeracy, literacy and actual thinking. All these educational activities assist children to acquire behavioural patterns and abilities necessary for effective social relations in future. The paper could be of great importance to all stakeholders in education who needs to train their children on the values of knowledge. The paper concluded that the idealist philosophy contains certain kinds of experience which could enrich the child's life to breed self realization and hence, social integration gradually. The paper recommended that the curriculum of the early childhood education should embrace the philosophy of self-realization so that the child should be able to relate his learning experience with early later experience in life.

Keywords:

Idealist philosophy, Early childhood education, Elements of philosophy, Bearing, and Conceptual clarification.



Introduction:

In the present day of technological development coupled with various kinds of vices such as kidnapping, killing, struggle for existence, there is needs for re-energization of the philosophy of idealism which breed the spirits of self realization, self preservation, and self determination into mind of children at the right time. This is virtually necessary for the inculcation of the development of spiritual reality into the mind of the child right from the early stage of life. This is possible because children can think, and link experiences about material objects or materials phenomena, and relates them through the power of their intellects or intelligence. All of which are all dependents on the self-realization which may be acquired through education. Education in this wise, enable children to enter more and more fully into the spiritual realms, and also enlarge the boundary of spiritual realm of self-realization. All these are on line with the idealist philosophy of education. Singh (2014) states that *idealist give much importance to 'self' of the individual and the development of their personality*. This lends credence to the view that, the early childhood education therefore strictly needs to improve the training of the moral of a child as central focus the spirit of self-realization in understanding, and premised on the fact that it's an effective and a dynamic instrument for moulding and harnessing children capabilities and structuring a future society in national building. The ultimate goals of early childhood education which entail social, psychological and physical developments of children cannot be realized in an environment devoids of the idealist theory. The idealist philosophy is a codified proposition of rational thoughts which guides, directs, and regulates early childhood education programs. This is because, it directs and examines ideas, arguments, problems and possible innovations through the ideal education of the mind expression as ideal in the mind of the children. The idealist theory is equally a form of mental x-ray of early childhood education in a given society with a view of expressing and eradicating its defaulting elements and reform to strength the programs through mind education.

It is undisputable fact that children are naturally curious, and would want to learn and know more, children are the people from whom we equally learns most because, most of them are active and noisy and they learn as they play and share experience amongst themselves. Each child is unique and different from others to some extent. Ayeni (2014) stated that *a human being, is to some extent, like every human being, while to some extent like few human beings and to some extent like no other human being...*



this variability in human perception impinges on individual personality differences which later breed self-realization. These are noticeable in the area of social relations or cultural upbringing, technological influence, and parental cares as perfected by parental philosophy of life. In order to understand children better, one needs to understand the family background which is in relation to idealist's philosophy, and these include their attitudes, beliefs, perception of the universe around them, actions and reactions to issues, situations and problems through mind.

These are regarded as personal philosophy of life because, they are ways of life that serve as vehicle of behaviours to accommodate and tolerate or reject others as an ideal behaviour of the mind.

In the National Policy of Education (2004) which is the National Philosophy of Education, the purpose of Pre-primary Education (Early Childhood Education) was stated as:

- (a) *effecting a smooth transition from the home to school.*
- (b) *preparing the child for the primary level of education.*
- (c) *providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work.*
- (d) *inculcating social norms.*
- (e) *inculcating in the child the spirit of inquiry and creation through the exploration of nature and the local environment by playing with toys, artistic and musical activities e.t.c.*
- (f) *teaching cooperation and team work.*
- (g) *teaching the rudiments of numbers, colours and shapes, through play &*
- (h) *teaching good habits, especially good health habits.*

The above lends credence to the view that the children are able to form mental pictures of things through their mind as it engages with the use of symbolism in an attempts to communicate with others and the environments. Ayeni (2014) states that *the focus of the mind is knowledge... this is expressed in the idea of mind engaged on active constructions of knowledge.*

One can sum up that individual has direct knowledge of working on his own mind, and that the idealist philosophy helps us to establish standards and formulate goals that help to set up sign post for her future. This philosophical stand point will be used to discover values, purposes, and the ideals toward the achievements of set goals and objectives of the early childhood education. This includes critical examinations of



methods and principles of solving the problem of children at the early period. It is against this backdrop, that this paper would be centered on the idealist philosophy and its bearing on the early childhood education. The paper, therefore, examines the essence of value knowledge, and values as is ideal of the minds in relation to the development of self-realization or discovery through the program of early childhood education.

Statement of the Problem

It appears that the idealist philosophy which breed self-discovery or self-realization and self-reliant as development of spiritual reality in children has not been properly implemented into our childhood education. One can easily observe that most of our adulthood are probably not fixed up after graduation or probably lack of good conducts due to their inability to discover or make use of their endowed talented spirits at the early stage so as to enhance self-realization in later life. On this, one can say that the issue of individuality to which individual uniqueness is recognized and assessed at the early stage to breed good behaviour and self-reliant has not been properly implanted. This study therefore, investigates a conceptual clarification of idealist philosophy to show its bearing on the early childhood education or to show how the two concepts entered into each other. This becomes necessary because, idealism is central to the principles of helping children to build their characters to enable them enhance their knowledge of nature and self-realization in later life.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this paper are:

- i. to clarify and justify the relationship between the idealist philosophy and the early childhood education and to see how the two concepts enter into each other
- ii. to draw implication on how the idealist philosophy can be used to promote the teaching of spirit of self-realization which breed self discovery and consequently self-reliance.
- iii. to examine and justify how the knowledge of the idealist philosophy can be used in promoting training of the mind in understanding of the world around.

Methodology

The methodology of approach is conceptual analysis. This involves explanation of the meaning of idealist philosophy, clarification of the various idea in relations with early childhood education, and examination of the various logical connection between idealist philosophy and the early childhood education, then the drawing of the conclusion and recommendations base on the logical connection between idealist philosophy and the



early childhood education.

General Overview of Idealism and the Early Childhood Education

In line with this paper, idealism means whatever exists is known to children through their mind or idea. That is, nothing can be known except the mind of the children think about them or take notice of them. Hence, the hall-marks of idealist education at early stage focuses on the identification, naming, counting and practical activities such as playing, seeing and touching, hearing, speaking and smelling e.t.c. Early childhood education therefore, focuses on the soul with the view of helping it recollect as much knowledge, through experience of the children at home, schools, and environment as possible. Hassan (2014) quoting Plato states that *"children knowledge is basically a recollection of the ideas which the soul has known in the perfect world of ideas before it was buried in the children bodies"*.

Idealism therefore, contends that there is an inner harmony between the body of children and the heart of the universe. Children are essentially spirited beings whose main aim in life must be to assist them to develop their spiritual nature. The children's spiritual natures are both individuals and mental. Children are being trained to be self-realized through the exploration of nature and environment and this is one of the ultimate goals of the early childhood education as the teachers are always seeking to promote the maturity in children. The activities to promote the position of self realization in children are accorded greater priority through innovations in accordance with the idealist philosophy.

The three element/crucial fundamental themes of philosophy around which all other philosophical problems are dusted are – metaphysics (reality, epistemology (knowledge) and axiology (values). To this, the clarification of idealist philosophy shall be staged as:

- i. idealist metaphysics (Reality) and the early childhood education
- ii. idealist epistemology (Knowledge) and the early childhood education.
- iii. Idealist concept of values (axiology) and early childhood education.

Generally, idealism gives primacy or priority to child's mind. By mind, it means the spiritual element in the child or the child's personality or the child's himself as different from his/her body.

The Idealist's Metaphysics and the Early Childhood Education

In the idealist metaphysics of the early childhood education, idealism is regarded as philosophy that tries to explain all reality in pupils as spiritual. N.T.I. (2018) states *that*



the idealists see the pupil as a spiritual being whose purpose in life is to express his own nature and to develop in accordance with his own rate of potentiality.... the mind of the child therefore is conceived as something towards which reference should be made.

In line with this, early childhood education should allow children personal freedom and cater for them. Early childhood education programs should be structured to child's, needs, and social background. Hence, the idealist philosophy of early childhood education may mean any of the followings:

- i. the child "self", his/her intelligence and the reasoning capacity of a child.
- ii. the mental or spiritual element in a child.

From the above explanation, therefore the programs of the learning experience in the early childhood education should be planned towards aiding or facilitating the ultimate reality or spiritual rather than physical, mental rather than materials which may be slow if unaided. This is why early childhood education should be for the discovery of the inner principle of the child by promoting the unfolding power of a child. To this, the idealist philosophy of early childhood education believes that reality is nothing but an activity of an individual child's mind and thoughts.

Idealist Epistemology and the Early Childhood Education

Idealist's epistemology deals with posing, reflecting, and examining the questions relating to knowledge or knowing. It posits that except there is mind to know an object, we cannot make any reasonable claims to its existence, for a thing to exist, it has to be perceived. Idealist's epistemology is the overall important of the mind, intelligence and mental health of the child in the process of acquiring knowledge during the programme of the early childhood education. Saadu & Ajikobi (2022) states that *"an individual who is in good mental health is more of his or her own abilities, able to deal with the stresses of everyday life, able to work effectively and productively and able to give back to the community"*.

This means that the information which the mind gathers together in the course of the early childhood education must fit well into each other and form a coherent and intelligible whole before one can pronounce them as units of knowledge. This lends credence to the view that the principle of coherent is adopted as a criterion of what is true just to avoid a situation in which a mad man ideas from his sick mind or mental imbalanced will claim to be as those of the healthy children. To the idealists, in the early children education... the school as an educational institution should provide the right atmosphere and proper direction for the growth of the personality of the child. It is to



enlarge his personality by increasing his knowledge... it is also to cultivate his aesthetics tastes, and to frame his characters and to equip him with suitable skills (Hassan 2004).

One can therefore infer that the philosophy of idealism serves as guidance for the early childhood education on the provisions of adequate cares and supervision for the children, and supervision for the children and to assist them to inculcate social norms as well as the spirit of inquiry and creativity. Hence, the problem of knowledge dissemination is central to the programs of the early childhood education because, it's has very close relation to the nature of children, essence of living, rationality, and reformative functions. Nature is surely one of the books out of which the Child learns. The teachers are to encourage first-hand or kick start the observations of natural phenomena and creativity by introducing the child to the wonders of nature through field trips or others outside the classroom and in the classroom. This is the process of the cultivation of the medium of symbols, colours, since human mind can be perfected and concentrated through these. *This is somehow in line with the view that education grows, advances, and has the capability to induce a person with characteristics that would make the person functions properly, and beside that, the capacity to develop is usually of value and that which could make the person to contribute positively to the development of the society that the people live in* (Amaddioha & Akor 2018).

Idealist Concept of Values and the Early Childhood Education

Children are valued beings. They prefer one thing to the other. They like, or dislike and have preferences. Children value good health, good clothing, happiness and peace. These are the social norms and are regarded as values to be inscribed in the curricular of the early childhood education, so as to pass across to them. Olawuyi, Obafemi, & Abdulqudry (2022) states that *"unless children are raised on a healthy and safety school's environment during childhood, their future development could be seriously hampered.... a healthy and safety learning environment is essentially for pupils of all ages"*.

This lends credence to the view that the idealist concept of values which encourages a desirable development of the state of mind is welcome in the teaching and learning of early childhood education in schools. In line with the early childhood education, and the objectives of teaching good habits and health, the idealist conception of value postulates how an individual child can be framed to enlarge his personality by increasing his knowledge to cultivate his characters, and equips him with suitable skills and values. In addition, the idealist philosophy embraces the products of culture and helps children to



develop the various capacity of the mind such as love of knowledge and intelligence as to be disseminated through the early childhood education.

The logical deduction from the above are that education aids children to construct knowledge through reasoning and through the configurations and juxtaposition of information or ideas, concepts and judgment, secondly, by forming judgment about a number of particular cases, or particular judgments and then desire from that judgment or cases, a general rule or principle by discovering the common qualities in them. Thirdly, we can make general inference from observing particulars event through the knowledge of observation.

Idealist Philosophy and its bearing on Early Childhood Education

The activities of the instruction in the early childhood education may be virtually impossible without the underlying principles of the idealist philosophy. This can be proved that the idealist philosophy of education gives guidelines on how to achieve the objectives of early childhood education. This is based on the fact that it seeks to know those values, purposes and ideas towards which the child training can be claimed. The Idealist philosophy describes pupils as spiritual beings whose purpose in life is to develop in accordance with his own rate of potentiality. One can then claims that the following can form the base for teaching and learning of the early childhood education in schools:

- i. the idealist philosophy of education seves as a point on which the teaching of self realization, social values and morality rest in the teaching and learning of the early childhood education. This aids them or assists them to prepare the child's for the better life in the future as he/she progresses in life.
- ii. The idealist's philosophy embraces democratic principle and states that the good life is possible only with a healthy organized political environment and this guides the basic principles of early childhood education as it is stipulates that children education should be democratic and universal.
- iii. The early childhood education believes that true knowledge lies in the idea of reasoning as postulated by the idealist philosophy. This form a base of the objectives of early childhood education programs. It states that, education should lay a strong foundational base for the beginning of scientific and reflective thinking through identification of objects, colours.
- iv. The idealist philosophy serves as pillar of education that enables the child to be intellectually and morally well balanced and in harmony with their social environment. This is based on the fact that the idealist philosophy enables limited



freewill for individuals from the actions and inactions of teachers.

- v. The early childhood education enables the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society with the limit of the child's capacity. This is in line with the idealist's philosophy as it states that education should be geared towards assisting the child to discover the reality of nature. The essence of the school is the cultivation of the mind. The mind cultivation should be done primarily through the medium of the symbols since human mind can work well through other in line with idealist's perception of the essence and function of the school is detected by the fundamentals of idealists.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that there are strong relationships between the early childhood education and the idealist philosophy. The essence of relationships between the early childhood education and the idealist philosophy are explicit to contain certain kinds of experience which could enrich the child's life and contribute to the later life of the child with good social integration, certain kinds of knowledge which would help the child to understand the world and to participate effectively within it, values, attitudes and personality which enables the child to develop into a good member of the society in later life. All the above should be the general attributes of early childhood education in line with the idealist's philosophy believe in the child's existence in the world of ideas as discussed.

Recommendations

Generally, most of the educational practices are predicated on some philosophical principles or thoughts such as idealist's philosophy. In the early childhood education practices, there are beliefs that the young ones need some developmental aids such as protections, nourishments, defense against diseases and physical injuries, emotional and social needs to mention just a few. Based on the above, the following recommendations are made

- i. the curricular of the early childhood education programs should be constantly reviewed from the child's immediate environment based on age and experience and new development, so that the child should be able to relate his learning experience to his daily experiences. The idealist philosophy suggests that teaching should be done scientifically using observations and identifications, method of questions and answers, based on measurable terms.
- ii. the individual differences in the child should be mostly considered during the



programs of the early childhood education. The teaching should be adopted towards these social, physical, and psychological difficulty of the mind during teaching and learning. The child should equally be exposed to the internet with enriched environments.

- iii. the mind of the child is innovative, hence, it has to be implanted upon by values or cultures of the society which is now degenerating. The teacher must be an example and a model for the child. The role of the teachers is not passive rather, he is active in the system to stimulate the mind of the child as designed by the idealists.
- iv. the method of teaching should be to motivate pupils for self learning to generate the philosophy of self consciousness that would eventually breeds self reliance.



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