

Methods and Teaching Strategies of Philosophy as a subject in African Primary Schools: A Case of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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| Article History | Abstract |
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| Original Research Article | <p><i>The necessity of teaching philosophy in African primary education evokes the question of the pedagogical inclination for realizing this. It is therefore on the foundation of such that this study investigates the best teaching methods for philosophy as a subject in African primary education system. Eight primary school teachers participated in a qualitative study using propositions from the reconceptualist theory of curriculum as these teachers' views were thematically analysed to find out how the best pedagogy for teaching philosophy as a subject in African primary school should be constructed. Findings suggested a careful blend of both teacher and learner centered methods of teaching with finer details of proper engagements to wit: teaching by interaction/discussion, teaching with audio-visuals, teaching through play, teaching through songs, teaching with illustrative strategy, teaching through field trips and excursions. These findings have implications for primary education intervention in Africa.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>philosophy, pedagogy, teachers, reconceptualism.</i></p> |
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Introduction

Philosophy for Children (P4C) has emerged as a novel programme that enables opportunities for learners to experience cognitive, social, and relational development within an educational context. It highlights the significance of interaction in directly influencing one's understanding, teaching methods and relationships with others, especially students. In pursuit of the fundamental goal of fostering a holistic approach to intellectual and personal liberation, this method advocates for educational practices that promote children's own freedom to exercise their own agency and independent thought (Matthew Lipman & Ann Margaret Sharp, 1980). Setting out P4C as a reflective, dialogical space for young learners to explore ideas and inquiry together (Välitalo, 2017).

Under this model, the traditional teacher-student paradigm is changed to a participatory one where learners in the environment are regarded as co-inquirers, working together with others for reasoning and discourse rather than being viewed as passive receivers of knowledge (Gregory, 2004; Haynes & Murriss, 2011). This move forms part of ongoing arguments being made about the future of teaching philosophy as a discipline; in particular, whether education should be dominated by a historical focus rather than

methods that emphasize how to think conceptually and interact actively with ideas. Therefore, current educational philosophies advocate for dialogical and practice-based approaches that allow students to actively engage in philosophy as reasoning and inquiry (Santi, 2014).

Perhaps, “one of the most traditional ways to teach philosophy in primary schools is a “historical approach”, which takes a historicist view of philosophy and uses teaching practice based on teacher-centred lessons and textbook study by students” (Santi, 2014 p. 285). For this method, “philosophy is learned as abstract knowledge, as theorisation on the world separated from life, as a collection of informative notions, or even as a way of thinking rather than an active process of thinking” (Santi, 2014 p. 285). Certain questions come to fore as we navigate this discourse. Questions like, what does “doing philosophy” mean in the classroom from an instructional perspective? Can philosophy be seen as a community activity or an individual enterprise through knowledge? Teaching and learning philosophy in education as “inquiry activity” that could be fostered in the classroom as part of the curriculum has been observed to have implications for thematic contents, epistemological bounds and ontological nature in

education (Santi, 2014). This was the reason that Resnick argued that, an inquiry of this nature must of necessity evaluate the complex instructional situations in which the experience and practice of philosophical inquiry should be carried out as the main educational activity in the classroom (Resnick, 1987). For Santi however, the constraints of formalizing philosophy should be considered chiefly in the conceptualization of the philosophical inquiry activity. These constraints are, “student cognition (e.g. learning potential, personal capability, attitude and disposition, interest in the field and knowledge thereof, acquired skills and performance, metacognitive awareness); the features of the instructional setting and community constraints (logistics, physical spaces, relationships, roles, values, scopes, priorities, power distribution, reciprocity); the use of various mediation tools as a means for thinking (material, conceptual, procedural, linguistic, methodological artefacts); the teachers’ beliefs and education; and the evaluation and assessment procedures adopted to promote and foster philosophical understanding in students” (Santi, 2014 p.286). The advocacy for Lipman’s philosophy for children resulted from a deliberate philosophical inquiry method which aimed at promoting philosophical inquiry in the classroom community. This episode normally begins with wondering at the world from an early age with a resultant conditioning of the child’s everyday life and experience towards philosophical dispositions, abilities and skills (Gregory, 2007a).

Similarly, but drawing on a pragmatist orientation to education, Santi (2014) argues that philosophizing operates as a kind of learning by doing grounded in collaborative inquiry. Learning philosophy, from this viewpoint, consists of performing philosophy and then inquiry is a goal round which curriculum design and teaching practice are centered. But the concept of 'activity' in education is still not clear and requires more theoretical clarification. Scholars, including Lev Vygotsky, James Wertsch, Alexei Leont'ev and Alex Kozulin have developed a socio-cultural paradigm based in activity theory highlighting the importance of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978; Leont'ev & Wertsch, 1981; Kozulin, 1986;). The contributions from these theories provide ways of conceptualizing the philosophical inquiry as the central classroom activity, thus giving clarity to the otherwise nebulous term “activity.”

From the philosophical perspective, Ludwig Wittgenstein conceived of philosophy not as doctrine but as an activity that invites us to think critically thereby displacing traditional teacher-centred pedagogical practices and textbooks being a primary source of knowledge (Bru et al., 2013). This orientation has informed the way curricula have been developed, with a focus on dialogically engaging with philosophical problems and texts. These approaches also

tend to use a Kantian dialectical method of inquiry (Kant), placing more emphasis on critical questioning and collaborative inquiry than any dogmatic dissemination of knowledge (Strawser, 2005). As a result, philosophy as education is reframed as something that begins in the first grouping where learners work together to construct understanding through some shared inquiry and then proceed from there.

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the reconceptualist theory of curriculum, which views curriculum as a process that shapes and reshapes both the concept and practice of curriculum. Reconceptualism, which has prominently been put forward by William Pinar and Madeleine R. Grumet, focuses on knowing about curriculum as a lived experience of the participants in an educational setting (Pinar, 1975). This argument critiques earlier models, particularly the traditional paradigm associated with Ralph Tyler, more oriented toward critical and interpretive understandings of educational experiences (Pinar & Grumet, 1976). The reconceptualist branch of thought challenges any robust form of empirical rigidity in curriculum construction, and lays with it the critical challenge that education must reclaim human experiences, identities, and possibilities ahead of technical goals (Reid, 1998). It also conceptualizes curriculum as a discontinuous, progressive process of change that do not seek to nurture established systems but celebrate new concepts in lieu of upholding static traditions (Pinar et al., 1995). Even though such an approach may contain a measure of theorizing in practice, such exploration is seen as a natural and essential part of meaningful curriculum development (Kridel, 1999).

Rooted in the reconceptualist tradition, this study is framed by the idea of *currere* which emphasizes the importance of actively and reflectively engaging with your own educational experiences. In the words of William Pinar et al. *currere* emphasizes circularity and a self-reflexive movement: as opposed to approaching curriculum as a sequential course to be completed (1995). Proponents of this approach emphasize learning with the verb form in order to highlight its active, dynamic nature, favouring individual agency—the potential of individuals to reinterpret and reconstruct their own educational lives as an act of wider autobiographical research (Graham; 1992). Our sense of *currere* here turns the table from curriculum as a structure to curriculum as lived, experiential and linear – an evolving process through time. For the reconceptualist, curriculum is seen to evolve with its focus on the learner (and here we are reminded that a key reconceptualist belief is that the curriculum is the collective story we tell our children about our past, our present and our future) (Graham, 1992). The search for meaning by the learners is an interactive and

reflective process undertaken in a social milieu, even as autobiography as writing the self in lived experience comes closest to hand as the prime candidate to accomplish such task of reconceptualization (Powell, 1985). The teachers' views on the possibility of understanding the child through their autobiography as well as through their unique educational routes and experiences remains a guiding benchmark for this study as teachers' views on best pedagogical inclinations for philosophy in African primary school is explored.

Methodology

Context

The study was undertaken in the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State (province) in Nigeria, as two primary schools were selected from each of the senatorial districts to make up a total of six primary schools in the entire state (province). Two teachers were selected from each of the schools to make up a total of twelve participants who responded to a semi structured questionnaire individually before coming together for a focus group discussion session.

Participants

Twelve teachers were purposively selected as pre-determined elements fit with specific in the study (Blanche, et al., 2006), and they included a mixed gender of different ages and diverse teaching experiences who have taught for not less than five years, drawn from six schools. The researchers sought out people who were experienced enough and willing to guarantee necessary information in tandem with what they decided as what needed to be known (Bernard, et al., 2016). It was recognised that all teachers have stories to tell (Creswell, 2013) about their experiences overtime in methods of teaching. The decision to work with twelve participants was premised on the importance of choosing a manageable number of participants in a bid to generate a thick description and rich data which should not be so large as to cause data overload which could pose a challenge to analysis (Cohen et al., 2011). Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate while taking diversity in terms of age, origin, and others into major consideration.

Table 1. *Research participants' background information*

| Name | Gender | Age | Senatorial District | Geographical Location | Teaching Experience |
|-------|--------|-----|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Udeme | Female | 36 | Uyo | Rural School | 5years |
| Mfon | Male | 45 | Ikot Ekpene | Urban School | 14years |
| Emem | Female | 29 | Eket | Urban School | 8years |
| Utibe | Male | 58 | Uyo | Urban School | 35years |
| Uduak | Female | 48 | Ikot Ekpene | Rural School | 24years |
| Imo | Male | 43 | Eket | Rural School | 18years |
| Idong | Male | 28 | Uyo | Urban School | 6years |
| Uforo | Male | 55 | Ikot Ekpene | Urban School | 30years |
| Etima | Female | 26 | Eket | Rural School | 6years |
| Inem | Female | 31 | Uyo | Rural School | 8years |
| Eme | Female | 38 | Ikot Ekpene | Rural School | 13years |
| Ubong | Male | 52 | Eket | Urban School | 20years |

Method

This study embraces new ways of looking at the world by adopting a qualitative interpretative research approach (Shank, 2006) since this study may prescribe a new way of engaging primary education in Africa. Qualitative approach situates a methodology gaining deep insight into any subject in question while expressly aiding peoples' thorough explanation of what makes sense of their circumstances in a social world (Cohen et al., 2011; MacNaughton et al., 2006). The perspective of the researcher matters in qualitative research and is not far

removed from the research process (Golafshani, 2003; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Shank, 2006). It becomes imperative to note that qualitative research modulates its founding assumption individual assemblage of realities as they interact with the (Merriam, 1998; Hale et.al., 2005). Therefore, teachers' engagement in this study revealed their perspectives on possible apt pedagogy for teaching philosophy in African primary education, with the chief strength of the qualitative methodology as used here laying in the depth understanding that it allows (Cohen et al., 2011).

Data generation

Data was generated for the study between February and May in the same year by engaging willing teachers who granted their consent before participating in the study after signing informed consent forms to confirm their willingness. The participants read and understood the aims and objectives of the study before data was generated. The study took roots from multiple sources of data which were semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The aim was to collate sufficient data to explore and develop collective interpretations that explains the probable emerging pedagogy for philosophy in primary education in Africa.

Interviews

An interview is deemed to be any dialogue with the purpose of collecting descriptions from the participants with respect to interpretation of understanding the described phenomena (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The study engaged each participant on an interview session which lasted between 45 – 60 minutes. The interview was driven by a set of semi structured questionnaire which interrogated their views and understandings of pedagogies for philosophy in African primary education. The researchers did conduct interviews in an office for privacy and comfort while asking the following questions to probe further in obtaining much data as possible:

- How should philosophy be taught in primary schools?
- What method should be used to teach philosophy in primary schools?
- What do you think is the most effective way to teach philosophy to your students?
- What tools should be used to teach philosophy in primary schools?

Focus group discussion

Focus group interviews are one of qualitative data generation methodologies, involving interactions and largely unstructured discussions between researchers and participants (Cohen et al., 2018). This method is best for obtaining similar ideas and collective specifics from several clients, generally held in groups of four–six or more (John W. Creswell & J. David Creswell, 2017). All of the twelve participants participated in the focus group discussions (two separate groups with 6 members each) in this study. Sessions lasted about two to three hours each, which is a long time for discussing teachers' perspectives on what the best pedagogies are for teaching philosophy in African primary education.

Data analysis

This study employed direct observation data generation, where the interviews and focus group discussions was

recorded verbatim in order to capture the accuracy and depth of participants responses. Data analysis, therefore, involves making sense of systematically organised and labelled data — based on mutual themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This includes transcribing interviews and observational data and coding analysis that offers recurrent patterns and themes. Using this method, the data were systematically sorted and interpreted to answer the research questions (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

For the study, we had to group together views related in close consanguinity while identifying themes and patterns. *Reconceptualist theory* informed the interpretation of the findings as dispositions which formed personal views were unearthed. As a follow-up to this, data related to perceptions on the teaching methods so as to identify themes and patterns were categorized. Findings heretofore guided by modes of belonging informed the explanation of the probable pedagogy for philosophy in African primary schools.

Findings

The findings presented show how teachers construct teaching methods for philosophy in African primary schools. The personal experiences that influenced the constructions of professional teachers' views are presented as influences upon the theory of reconceptualism. The explanation shows how *Reconceptualism* as a theory influenced the construction of their views. Fictitious names were used to protect the identity of the participants to align with research ethical standards (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For the purpose of this research, sources of data were abbreviated as follows: interview (NI) and Focus group discussion (FGD).

Influences upon *Reconceptualism*: Teachers' views on how philosophy should be taught in African primary schools

The pedagogic practice of teaching philosophy to primary students reflects the tenets of reconceptualist curriculum theory that refrain from preserving rigid traditions and advocate for critical re-examination and new paradigms emerging through philosophical engagement (Pinar et al., 1995). At the heart of this view is *currence*, as described by Pinar (1994), as the vehicle through which one reflects on and recasts oneself within educational practice (Nsibande, 2007). Within this framework, the study found that teachers were able to suggest contextualised ways of teaching philosophy in African primary schools, and also how to improve the learner-centredness for understanding and ownership of learning.

The suggested teaching methods from the participants fall into the following two main categories, learner-centred and teacher-centred. Under these broad categories, 40 specific

practices were reported by teachers, including interactive discussions, play-based learning, songs and storytelling, demonstrations and audio-visual resources. The strategies embody a synthesized pedagogical approach that aims to balance active learner engagement with structured facilitation to enable rich philosophical thinking at base levels of education.

Learner-centred method

The constructivists construe the learner-centred method as an approach which emphasizes that learners construct their knowledge actively rather than passively transmitted information from textbooks and teachers (Brown, 2003). The learners inductively construct new concepts and ideas from what they already know. For Scheurs and Dumbraveanu (2014), “the concept of constructivist learning can be structured in four (4) core features: *knowledge construction, cooperative learning, self-regulated learning and using real world problems*. Knowledge construction is the core element of the constructivism theory, in which learners interpret new information using knowledge and experience they already have. Cooperative learning is essential for knowledge construction and sharing, in which learners, teachers, and external experts of the study-domain contribute to the construction of knowledge through social interactions. Self-regulation, which includes setting learning objectives, self-observation, self-assessment, and self-reinforcement, is believed that it has a great influence on learning outcomes and learners’ performance” (p.4).

Participating teachers in the study who suggested that philosophy should be taught in primary schools through learner centred method preferred that the following strategies should be used:

a. Teaching by interaction/discussion

These presuppositions also included offering a type of integrated attainable philosophy and that the teaching of philosophy in basic education must be essentially interactive wherein emphasis is placed on active learner involvement in the teaching–learning process. Interaction is viewed as an important aspect of quality pedagogy through engagement and understanding (Hafen et al, 2015). Additionally, empirical research provides evidence that the development of positive teacher–child interactions is fundamental to influencing classroom processes through which teachers support students in their learning (Hamre et al., 2013). Thus, interaction is not only in addition to but it is one of the salient factors driving successful learning.

Especially with higher order thought, discussion-based teaching is a great tool in this context to develop the idea. Discussing enables learners to transform and create new ideas from the information (Larson 2000) they have

constructed collective meaning while being encouraged to explain their thoughts, not just churn out textbook material. In such an engagement, students do not receive knowledge passively but become the carriers of knowledge. Combining the considerations of many scholars regarding effective classroom discussion (Parker & Hess, 2001), it is a genuinely recognized and effective classroom practice for fostering critical thinking and communicative competence (Costa-Giomi 2012). These views resonate with teachers' understanding of philosophy education at primary level as interactive and dialogical.

b. Teaching with audio-visuals

They also noted that it was crucial to train any teachers who interacted with primary education students to use audio-visual aids in the teaching of philosophy, as they were said to have a proven track record as learner-centred strategy (Fayokun et al 2010). Audio-visual materials like charts, maps models, projectors, radio and television act as instructional tools which enrich the teaching–learning process by making the content more appealing, approachable, and valuable (Rasul et al., 2011). By integrating both visual and auditory stimuli, these devices push learners’ experiences beyond what reading alone can accomplish, which supports a deeper level of retention. Such tools are apparent as powerful informational systems that can substantially enhance instructional effectiveness (Scheurs & Dumbraveanu, 2014), research suggests. In addition, audio-visual aids engage learners’ thinking and characterize classrooms with active participation and interaction rather than monotony alone, contributing to better learning gain (Mathew & Alidmat, 2013). These results support the teachers’ view that audio-visual approaches are well-suited for engaging young learners in deep philosophical discussions.

c. Teaching through play

Extensive literature supports a more holistic perspective of play as an autochthonous and developmentally appropriate expression of childhood that has substantial educational value, particularly in early learning contexts (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). The foundation of basic skills: such as language development, early literacy, and social interaction are properly nurtured through play-based learning by providing young children with meaningful and motivating context to develop their underlying needs (Ali et al. However, studies conducted in Northern Ireland that compare different curricular approaches (Walsh et al., 2006) also report that play-based curricula such as the Enriched Curriculum (EC) lead to better quality learning experiences for younger children (aged four to five years) than formal ones. Play also helps them develop cognitively as well as socially, given that it encourages rule making, awareness of results, and feedback on metacognitive

processes related to recognizing what others think and feel. Play is regarded as a heuristic form that plays a communicative and sociality role in different settings, whilst also being a medium for development in many areas (Barton & Wolery 2008). Other research supports that play is a major channel for global learning, since it engages the naturally occurring interests of young children and supports active participation (Ozen et al., 2012; Yanardag, 2013; Jung & Sainato, 2013; Bulunuz, 2013). Such findings support teachers views about including play for philosophy teaching in primary school education, as it promotes an interactive environment contributing to the construction of knowledge while simultaneously developing important social and cognitive competencies among young learners.

d. *Teaching through songs*

Since the last two decades, teaching through songs have been found suitable pedagogical strategy to facilitate a positive learning environment in classrooms and for engaging students actively with the content. Research shows that lessons with enjoyable aspects such as music are more effective because they engage students emotionally and involve them actively (Setia et al., 2012). Songs can stimulate emotions, train memory retention allowing students to memorize and remember key topics while livening up classes. Moreover, appropriately chosen songs can be used to engage students in lively discussions and instigate a more in-depth class participation (Abd Rahim, 2014).

Empirical research, too, illustrates how music can help in trainability of certain skills. For example, Hidayat (2013) on his research found that songs can greatly improve students' listening comprehension. Likewise, it could be evidenced by a descriptive investigation through Almutairi and Shukri (2016) who managed the topic of the way in which teachers are aware of the advantages that songs offer to have better oral communication skills in youngsters. Further research contributed to this area, showing that songs can enhance students' motivation, confidence and the total amount of learning by making lessons enjoyable and the content more memorable for learners (Setia et al., 2012). These insights corroborate what teachers perceive, that songs included in philosophy teaching at the level of primary education can boost engagement, understanding and active participation in learning.

Teacher-centred method

In addition, the results from this study showed that teachers would prefer that teacher-centred methods of teaching philosophy be included as well, such as illustration and field trips along with practical classroom activities. According to Al-Zu'be (2013), the teacher-centred approach is based on the premise that the teacher should

assume the role of prime knowledge source through his/her own sort of expertise, which in this case serves to assist learners with understanding and making connections between concepts. Here, the course assumes a passive role for students, whereas teachers work as the primary deliverers of learning material, ensuring that content flows in an orderly manner and instructions are clear.

a. *Teaching with illustrative strategy*

The research literature shows consistent benefits of illustrations in teaching (Rainey et al., 2018), including increased learner interest and engagement, support for the three dimensions of science learning - building towards inquiry practices, improving conceptual understanding and developing extended interaction with texts. Related research indicates that visual materials including illustrations in picture books can serve as an inquiry tool by allowing students to interpret visuals, generate questions and engage in metacognitive thought (Lohfink, 2012). These results support teachers views that the use of illustrative strategies in primary philosophy can be particularly apposite for important reasons around comprehension, curiosity and action related to philosophical practices.

b. *Teaching through field trips and excursions*

Field trips are known for being more successful when they are well planned and implemented, which translates into being a positive influence on student engagement during field trips this can contribute to long-term effects of interest in learning (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014), and overall better academic performance including literacy skills. Additionally, involvement in field-based learning opportunities has been positively correlated with the development of favourable feelings toward content knowledge along with measurable increases in understanding what they have learned about the knowledge (Kisiel, 2006). This advantage is consistent with teachers' perspectives in this study, who asserted the use of field trips and excursions-based strategies in primary education teaching philosophy which have enhanced learning enriched experiences and stronger conceptual knowledge.

Implications for teaching philosophy as a subject in primary education

The findings from the study foregrounds the influences from personal perspectives and experiences of teachers in teaching philosophy as a subject in primary schools (Jensen, 2023). It is not only what teachers experience in the field, but what they consider as expedient strategies of integrating philosophy into the primary education curriculum in African education.

The findings point to the need of blending both student centered and teacher centered methods of teaching in assessing strategies for this innovation while experiences, beliefs, values and perspectives of primary school teachers can inject fresh and robust insights into a well-orchestrated method of teaching philosophy as a subject in African primary education since they inform practices and influence educational decisions (Ekpo, 2023). The method of research highlights the importance of teaching by interaction/discussion; teaching with audio-visuals; teaching through play; teaching through songs; teaching with illustration; teaching through field trips and excursions. We can argue from the foregoing that, emphasis on reflective practices enhances the development of expedient and appropriate methods and strategies for teaching philosophy in the primary education system.

Conclusion

The two pedagogical approaches identified, - learner-centred and teacher-centred vary mainly in their evaluation of learning outcomes. Teacher-centred approaches are more likely to assess learning indirectly via standardized, objectively scored tests; whereas, in learner-centred approaches assessments tend to be direct, including portfolios, performances, essays and projects (Good & Brophy 2013). Equally important is the recognition that teachers' instructional practices do not occur in a vacuum; rather, they are influenced by epistemic and pedagogical beliefs about knowledge and learning (du Plessis, 2016). Epistemic beliefs pertain to conceptions of knowledge and how it is best acquired, and pedagogical beliefs describe teachers' understanding of effective teaching-learning processes (Chai et al., 2010). As a result, these basic assumptions about how teaching ought to be are often used as the foundation on which instructional strategies take place (Ertmer, 2005).

Results indicate that teachers generally favour a mixed pedagogical approach combining both teacher-centred and learner-centred teaching method in philosophy within African primary education. This hybrid strategy enables flexible, responsive instruction that can be referred to as contingent instruction (see Wood et al., 1999). This study calls for future work to expand on the practical application of integrated or contextual approaches, with a view towards enhancing pedagogical practice and advancing curricular innovation in African primary education.

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