

# **Theoretical Frameworks and Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

**Subject Area: Philosophy of Education**

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## **Abstract**

The crux of this paper is that the role of philosophy in education is not just a matter of shaping the solidity of pertinent ideas, technical skills, cherished values, or expected attitudes that adhere to an exact paradigm or that conforms to a set of ratified methodological rules. Instead, an influential philosophy in education has to enhance and adapt a continuum which is apposite in its nature, structure, and essence. An apt philosophy enhances concrete education by means of substantiating such education and shaping it within a specified theory. The implication is that such a theory is necessary to define education in terms of its nature, structure, and essence. A philosophical attempt to shape education using a theoretical framework is comparatively the rationale of this paper.

As such, theory plays an important role in determining the nature of educational discourse, including teacher education in a relative perspective. It is therefore necessary to determine the place of theory in the process of education practice, and also ascertain the implication that theory as reflected in indigenous knowledge systems (Mwinzi, 2012:79). A crucial factor in the indigenous knowledge systems rests on the reality of existentialism, communalism, holism, preparationism, perennialism, and functionalism in African rationality.

**Keywords:** philosophy, education theory, education practice, frameworks, indigenous, knowledge systems, logical empiricism, critical rationalism, critical theory, existentialism, communalism, holism, preparationism, perennialism, and functionalism.

## **1. Theoretical Frameworks**

An imperative purpose of philosophy in education is to generate theories and adapt them to estimate and augment education practice. As such, philosophy provides a platform of theoretical thinking to make education more germane and accurately practical. A wide reflection about reality, thoughts, and ideas denotes a theory. A theory may occur when someone sees dark clouds outside and concludes, or theorizes that it is going to rain because of the clouds are dark. This inclusive

inference on pedagogical opinions and notions may portray facets such as cultural theory of education which considers how education occurs within the totality of a specified culture, including all the realms of a given society. An inherent outcome of theory within a cultural context is pragmatic in character and abstract in nature. The pragmatic and abstract nature of theory defines communalism, holism, preparationism, perennialism, and functionalism as the base of African thought which is perceived in this paper as indigenous knowledge systems.

The primary purpose of theorizing is to achieve a better understanding of a human enterprise in terms of its empirical and definite aspects. In education practice, a theory gyrates around topics such as, penology, andragogy, curriculum, learning, policy, organization, pedagogical leadership etc. Similarly, educational theory is influenced by a myriad of disciplines such as history, sociology, philosophy, psychology etc. In principle, a theory in education seeks to know, understand, and prescribe apt practices of pedagogy.

Kombo and Tromp (2006:56) hold that a theory is a reasoned statement or groups of statements supported by evidence to explain an event or a phenomenon. The term theory refers to the general and abstract principles of facts (Mwinzi, 2012:126). A theory may consist of hypothesis that has been verified by observation or experiment, or a systematic thinking defined by coherence in thoughts (Randolph, 2009:3). An interaction with theories or ideological constructs enables philosophers to evaluate the impact of human enterprises such as education practice.

This is why the concept of theory in the teaching and learning is incessantly influential and also indispensable in restructuring of educational activities to match existing philosophical tenets. The rationale which delineates the essence of this paper is an attempt to respond to the question: what is the role of theory in pedagogical events in relation to the fundamental tenets of thought?

As such, meaningful education practice is defined by the capacity to utilize more abstraction in thinking and reasoning to meet the prevailing needs within a specified geographical region, and later projected to synchronize the global precincts. A theory must shape education practice, and be orientated towards indigenous knowledge systems.

The current situation in Africa is that theory has been given a nominal role in defining practice in education (Shouler, 2008:243). Based on this discrepancy, it is the role of this paper to explore the dynamics of how theoretical frameworks can be aptly interrelated with indigenous knowledge in an attempt to refocus attention towards better participation in academic activities. The value of relating theoretical frameworks and indigenous knowledge is the essence of African perspective of thought which includes ethnophilosophical view, existential slant, political insight, and formal philosophy. These abstract perspectives of African philosophy are solidified by the notions of communalism, holism, preparationism, perennialism, and functionalism (Mwinzi & Higgs, 2013:128). It follows necessarily that an ideal education in Africa must be communal, holistic, perennial, functional, and prepare learners to uphold the essence of societal aspirations.

## **2. Methodology**

A methodological approach in this paper comprised of qualitative paradigm, whilst, the fundamental tool of collecting information was primarily interviews among students and faculty members at South Eastern Kenya University. In addition, empiricism and rationalism theories as reflected in African philosophical slants are utilized to reveal the significance of theoretical and

practical frameworks in indigenous knowledge systems. Drawing from this paper, education practice must lead the learner to interact with the following theoretical frameworks in philosophy:

- Logical empiricism which claims that the most reliable form of knowledge emanates from direct experience through the senses (Audi, 2006:515).
- Critical rationalism involves the questioning and examination the authenticity of ideas and practices. In this regard, intense thinking and open discourse are imperative in solving issues adjacent to human situation (Curren, 2006:307).
- Critical theory which focuses on an understanding of what power structures are all about, and the impact that such power structures have on individuals, societal agencies, and social institutions (Curren, 2006:495)
- In its theoretical framework, African philosophy articulates the significance of African perspective of thought in response to the dominance of Western thought and its claim of cultural superiority (Mwinzi & Higgs, 2013:130)

In conclusion, philosophy of education remains as a critical and oppositional discourse for understanding challenging and responding to issues in knowledge systems using theoretical astuteness. Such a critical and oppositional discourse appraises the concepts, beliefs, assumptions, and values in prevailing education theories and practices.

A basic feature of theory is that it seeks to emancipate the students and their teachers from their dependency on practices that are the product of precedent ideological constructs by developing modes of enquiry that are implicit in the theoretical framework through which teachers organize their experiences and practices. It is therefore argued that without the necessary theoretical astuteness, teachers will not be able to interact critically with cultural, social and economic concerns which direct impact upon their classroom practice.

### **3. The Concept of Educational Theory**

A theory is the general principle or a set of abstract facts that operate in contrast to practice. As such, a theory can denote hypotheses that are verified by observation, experiment, or a slant presaging systematic thinking that comprises of coherence of thoughts. An educational theory is the outcome of pedagogical conjecture on matters of teaching and learning. As such, an educational theory is the product of studying educational practice. Educational theory enhances educational practice in as far as educational theory suggests ways and means to overcome the problems of educational practice.

There are three distinct types of educational theories derived from three different perspectives. The first one is the point of view held by educational practitioners, second is the perspective adopted by educational scientists, and the third is the perspective taken by the educational philosophers. These perspectives are important basis of understanding of education practice. In an abridged format, these theories of education are classified as general educational theory, scientific educational theory, and philosophical educational theory.

#### **3.1 General Educational Theory**

A general education theory draws its inspiration from the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, but also finds confirmation in traditional Chinese education, thoughts of Mencius and Confucius. The general education theory is the attempt to arrive at a better understanding of education practice based on a deliberate focus of an intellectual notion of a

pedagogical situation. In this regard, philosophical abstraction is indispensable in shaping the essence of general education theory.

The role of an educational practitioner is an incessant participation in the practice of education be it as a teacher, an administrator, an inspector, a school-board member, or a parent. When all these stakeholders encounter an educational issue, they reflect and speculate about it as an attempt to understand it and find an apt solution. Such speculative approach is the metaphysical method of inquiry and as such, it is philosophical in nature. As mentioned earlier, the outcome of general theory is hypothetical in character and realistic in nature. In an attempt to arrive at a better understanding of education practice, an educational practitioner may not concentrate on being acquainted with the technical details about the entirety of education, but what is necessary to define the general education theory.

Accordingly, general educational theory is analogous to communalism. Communalism is the aspect of indigenous knowledge system which enhances group cohesion against unnecessary individualism and competition. Someone is expected to be familiar with social atoms that define the society. The essence of communalism emanates from the phenomenology or existentialism. In this case, thinking is accompanied by an explanation of why an African exists.

In a similar vein, general educational theory upholds the aspect of perennialism. As such, perennialism is an aspect of indigenous knowledge system which concentrates on transmitting cultural richness or heritage from one generation to another. In this regard, such knowledge should be incessant in nature. With this fact it had strong element of being perennial. The cultural identification as part of upheld knowledge system provides the basis of purpose and direction as declared in Ubuntu in a humanistic approach to philosophy. An incessant search for models of excellence and paradox of possibilities, provides the background of liberation, opposition, and affirmation in education policy and practice.

### **3.2 Scientific Educational Theory**

A scientific education theory is the product of scientific approach towards the study and the activities of education practice. An educational scientist is one who adopts a scientific approach in the study of educational problem. This theory emanates from scientific studies or activities on education issues. The perspective isolates an educational issue, analyses it and describes it. This theory is sustained by the analytical approach of philosophy.

The approach is analytic in nature, and it is influenced by other theories emanating from social sciences and humanities such as psychological, sociological, economic, political and administrative theories etc. Scientific education theory evaluates the totality of issues riling education practice, splits such issues into parts, highlights on one part, and makes it an item of concern.

Therefore, the prospect of scientific education theory is to isolate, analyze, and describe a problem within education practice such that details are obtained from diverse perspectives of such an education issue and detailed implications are defined using scientific educational theory. An outcome of such analysis leads towards discovering the consistencies, abstract propositions, and potential generalizations that can analytically describe the patterns of issues in education practice.

In this paper, scientific education theory can integrate preparationalism. African thought upholds preparationalism as the aspect of indigenous knowledge system which insists that every human event is philosophically destined to prepare someone to be useful in the society or to serve a certain end including the household, village and even clan. In such context, the focus of such preparation is founded on active participation and imitation. This indigenous aspect portrays the rationality required to shape theories and policies to enhance education practice.

### **3.3 Philosophical Educational Theory**

Philosophical educational theory is the realm of philosophers and the scholars who engage themselves with the study of the relationship between philosophy and education or the philosophy of education. A philosophical educational theory is the outcome of educational speculation upon inimical elements of education. In this realm, exponents think about issues in education practice before and after educational scientists complete an investigative study of such subject matter. The philosophers question the basis of the scientist's assumption, the concept implied, the methods used and the comprehensive scientific educational theory generated in an attempt to achieve an integral and objective perception of a specified issue in education practice. In other words, these philosophers question the assumptions, examine the concepts, and evaluate the methods used in an endeavour to obtain a decisive and comprehensive theory of education.

In principle, philosophical educational theory generates a thesis, postulates a synthesis, and constructs an antithesis which projects an integral, and a comprehensive foundation which is necessary to substantiate education practice in terms of elemental principles, irrefutable values, and decisive inferences.

In this case, the elemental principles, irrefutable values, and decisive inferences should be functional in nature. Therefore, functionalism is an element of African indigenous knowledge which necessitates the principle of being pragmatic through an immediate induction into society. The nature of this system is to learn and be functional or be able to perform or do the assigned duties. This is the crux of social philosophy and critical pedagogy in Africa.

In African perspective, philosophical educational theory is parallel to holicism. In this case, holicism serves as a facet of an African indigenous knowledge system which approves an all-round person in terms of life; ranging from social features, cultural traits, economic character and political frame. It focuses on learning in its totality or a whole human being.

### **4. The Significance of Theory in Education Practice**

As already noted, the main aim of theorizing in education practice is to achieve a better understanding of education as a human enterprise, the emphasis being on the practical aspect of education. A theory is important in the teaching and learning situation which is the basis of education practice. As such, a theory in education practice augments the teacher's ability to interpret, understand, and influence the prevailing education policies and structures.

A theory provides an understanding of ideas and knowledge which defines the essence of teaching and learning. In this case, educational theories are required to inform education practice in terms of refining the strategies, techniques, and means of an effective encounter with the learning needs of learners in pedagogical settings. Some theoretical frameworks used in philosophy of education such as logical empiricism, critical rationalism, African philosophy, phenomenology, hermeneutics,

critical theory, systems theory, and postmodernism, (Mwinzi, 2012: 20 & 42, Dall'Alba, 2009: 8) determines the nature of education practice, and provides suitable paradigm of academic research in education. In this context, theories are mandatory in developing and relating models in education practice.

In that vein, theories cannot be eliminated from explaining puzzling and complex issues in education practice as an exertion to predict its occurrence in the future. As such, teaching and learning is a latent process whose intervening variables are equivocal and ambiguous such that isolating the pragmatic facets from the complexity and absurdity adjacent to inept education practice is acute. A theory explains, predicts, abridges, and converges the fundamental aspects within the process of pedagogy to expedite understanding, explain observations, and envisage future potentialities.

The future prospects require diverse epistemological theories to allow the transfer of information from an education setting to that of another and to explain the procedures in education practice. A framework of a theory can be utilized in a complex and comprehensive settings of teaching and learning to necessitate a conceptual explanation. The implication is that theories in education practice convey different 'lenses' to scrutinize intricacy, ambiguity, and perplexity found on educational issues, attention on the data and setting an ambiance of analysis. As such, theories provide greater mechanisms and opportunities for improvement by design which is necessary for improving the potential for teaching and learning.

## **5. Conclusion**

In as far as philosophical thinking about education encourages clarification of meanings and justification of statements the philosophy of education may even be regarded as being "very useful" apart from being valuable as a discipline on its own right.

Educational theory is the product of studying educational practice. The theory enhances educational practice in as far as educational theory suggests ways and means to overcome the problems of educational practice. The educational theory has been derived from three perspectives;

Within the context of general educational theory, the role of educational practitioner is to integrate theory into practice in a teaching and learning situation, be it a teacher, an administrator, an inspector or a school board member. When all the above mentioned individuals are faced with a problem, (educational problem) they tend to think about it in order to a solution. In such a case one may think of educational theory in respect of educationists and the implication of theories in educational situations.

Educational theory seeks to know, understand and prescribe educational practices. Philosophers and psychologists have sought to understand how learning occurs and how one influence another person's learning. Various theories have been established. An apt understanding of reality is embedded on theories to shape a clear idea of such reality.

According to scientific educational theory, the role of educational scientist is to adopt an intrinsic stance of the study of science education, be it sociology, psychology, economics cuts totality of education, then isolates one part and considers the one concerned. In sociological perspective, scientific educational theory is concerned with the study of groups of people within educational

institutions, how people conceptualize the purpose of schools organization, teaching and interests of people. In the same vein, the structures of schools are also examined in sociological analysis. It also analyses the impact of social change on experience of children as well as the characteristic of school participants.

A psychological analysis of education comprises distinct topics that span human development, individual differences, measurement, learning, motivation which are constituents of theory-driven discipline.

An administrative analysis of scientific educational theory integrates a systematic analysis of economic, geographic, democratic, census, behavioural data to identify trends, and conditions useful too aid administrators in making policy and resource allocation decisions.

The essence of philosophical educational theory is estimate scientific analysis, to question the assumptions of the various educational sciences, and to examine the concepts and methods used. A philosopher generates a synthesis, and an integrated approach that is necessary to formulate a comprehensive theory of pedagogy, which accounts for education in terms of basic principles, basic values, and envisaged meanings.

Accordingly, a theory shapes an apt ability to establish the danger of strict authoritarian approach of traditional education which focused on delivering destined knowledge, and abrogated the myriad and actual learning experiences of the learner. As such, a theory in education portrays a grounded character to shape and facilitate the entire process of teaching and learning. Human experiences that account for and facilitate in designing effective education emanate from theories such that theories are necessary in designing innovative educational approaches and programmes.

A good theory must shape education practice to uphold the content of the curriculum, the cultural heritage, the progressive role of education, and the internal interests of the learner. A theory must facilitate a reasonable degree of unity in diversity, but continuity in variety between an individual learner and the substance being learned. Accordingly, the theory shapes and guides the interactive realm of learning activities between the teacher and the learner.

In a school situation, the essence of theories is to provide the teacher with guiding principles for better understanding and management of educational problems in the classroom and in a learning institution. After learning the theories, a teacher knows how information is absorbed and processed as well as retention by the learners.

The theories liberate those being educated and the educators from their own short sightedness, which educates" use and "value" in a practical manner. The implication is that theories enable a teacher to think logically, systematically, consistently, and clearly about educational problems such as clarifying meanings and justifying statements. It follows necessarily that a theory provide an educator with effective strategies for teaching, deeper insights of the background and needs of the learner, apposite assertiveness to recognize diverse stances that can augment erroneous notions and inconsistent world views in education practice.

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