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Article

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AFRICAN NATIVE-CENTRIC EPISTEMOLOGY: A FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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Abstract

In Africa, identity is challenged by identity crisis due to colonialism. Colonialism is a period of uncertainty and confusion that affects African ways of knowing their identity. As the colonial identity reshapes African culture, there need to reintegrate indigenous ways of knowing with globalize epistemology. Through a method of philosophical analysis, the paper examines relevance of African Native-Centric Epistemology with the intention of proposing it as a policy framework for addressing the impacts of colonialism. African native centric epistemology prioritizes experiential, oral and relational ways of knowing, as opposed to the abstract, individualistic and linear forms of knowledge common in Western tradition. The study concludes that African native-centric epistemology reform of school curriculum and a thoughtful reflection on indigenous knowledge and moral values needed to balance the structure and autonomy of Africans. This is possible through trans-epistemic dialogue of mutual respect among different epistemologies.

Keywords: African, Epistemology, Globalization, Identity Crisis, Native, Teaching, Western.

Introduction

Colonialism was not only a physical occupation of Indigenous lands but also an epistemological domination. Through colonialism, indigenous ways of knowing were suppressed, invalidated or destroyed. Postcolonial epistemologies have continued to struggle to dislocate already established colonial systems, which has led to inequality,

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cultural dislocation and epistemic violence. Native-Centric Epistemology refers to knowledge systems rooted in indigenous worldviews, cosmologies, ethics and practices. It is based on holistic approach to knowledge that emphasizes oral tradition, spirituality, lived experiences over individual analytical used. If adopted, it will be a policy framework to dismantle colonial legacies and restore sovereignty, dignity and harmony to Indigenous peoples. In Africa, the upbringing of children is influenced by colonial epistemologies and ethical perspectives, leading to a complex landscape in shaping the values and beliefs of children and their development (Roy et al., 2012). Colonialism prompted a reevaluation of questions about the nature of knowledge, human responsibilities, because it influence values on children's upbringing and the imposition of values that differ from African orientations thus posing challenges for parenting. This has led to questions: Can African epistemologies and culture continue to be viewed through the lens of another culture? How can African education liberate itself from Eurocentric dislocations for the interest of the children? The need to create an African-centered perspective that takes Africa as the beginning and departure point in the analysis of its history and culture is one of several concerns of the native-centric epistemology.

Eurocentrists, such as British Empiricist David Hume, saw blacks as inferior to whites. German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in his essay on "The Philosophy of History," saw the absolute spirit not moving towards Africa, and therefore Africans portrayed as uneducated, unhistorical and uncultured people (Bernasconi, 2002). The education system in Nigeria was structured to serve the interests of the colonial administration rather than the indigenous population (Davis & Kalu-Nwiwu, 2001). The curriculum focused more on teaching British values, language and history, often neglecting Nigerian cultures and traditions. This led to a loss of indigenous knowledge systems and undermined the development of a robust local educational framework (Sami, 2005). African-native-centric epistemology is deeply rooted in its cultural practices, including rituals, language, and communal living. This will help in understanding epistemic justice and the ways knowledge is shared in African communities (Kapumba, 2023). Although globalized epistemology is good, it has a significant negative impact on children, particularly in developing countries, often leading to increased child labor, disrupted education, exposure to harmful cultural influences and a heightened risk of exploitation (Giddens, 2003). Nevertheless, African ways of knowing are challenged by individualism; it should be understood on their own terms rather than through a Western framework (Wiredu, 1998). The Nigerian children face colonial epistemological ambivalence, a state where individuals are torn between believing and not believing a proposition about facts relevant to a decision, leading to an identity crisis (Williamson, 2021). The psychosocial conflict of colonial epistemologies led to cultural alienation (Eegunlusi, 2017). The colonial rule in Africa brought about the imposition of European epistemologies, values, and lifestyles, which resulted in a disconnection between Nigerian children and their traditional cultures and the education system.

African indigenous languages, customs and practices were often viewed as inferior or irrelevant, creating a cultural divide and a sense of identity loss among the younger generations. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) reawakens traumatic memories, leading to depression and anxiety (Osebor & Ogelenya, 2022). Africa, unlike Western cultures, does not have epistemological ambivalence towards childhood leading to an identity crisis. Instead, Africans welcome children into stable knowledge, nurturing extended family structures where duty and responsibility override individualism as the dominant value

system (Sami, 2005). African knowledge systems must be grounded in critical thinking and rationality rather than accepting racism or traditional beliefs of the West without question. Colonialism, if not checked, relegates the idea of scientific knowledge and intellectual autonomy for African thinkers (Hountondji, 2009). The native knowledge is communal and promotes psychiatric well-being by ensuring a degree of joint responsibility for children. The question is: How should children be taught in this post-colonial era and within the tenets of indigenous epistemologies to avoid identity crisis while thinking critically about colonialism and independently in the digital age? We argue that parents must regulate children's epistemology and its implications on global interconnectedness, including issues of privacy, screen time, and the impact of social media on mental health (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis).

Philosophers like Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill offer contrasting views on human-centric epistemology. Kant's deontological epistemology focuses on adherence to moral duties, while Mill's utilitarianism emphasizes the consequences of actions. Deontological epistemology is a theory of knowledge that emphasizes the importance of ethical duties or obligations in the process of acquiring knowledge (Booth, 2008). The deontological frameworks focus on the norms or duties governing belief formation, justification, and the pursuit of truth. The act of knowing is not merely a matter of receiving true beliefs but involves the fulfillment of certain duties or responsibilities. Parents must balance these perspectives, teaching children to weigh principles against outcomes in their decision-making processes. A deep analysis is needed to gain an in-depth understanding and clarify questions on colonialism, identity crisis, and existence. Philosophical methods of analysis help to clarify concepts such as native-centric knowledge and how oral traditions and practical wisdom must be instilled in African children (Akoleowo, 2024; Brighouse et al., 2016). This paper discusses a Native-Centric epistemological framework as a guide for policies for decolonization and cultural revitalization of African culture. It critically examines the task of imparting native-centric values to understanding of the right and wrong in a global interconnected world.

Conceptual Clarifications

African Native-centric epistemologies are ways of knowing that are rooted in indigenous or local knowledge systems (Osebor & Ibor, 2023). It involves the justification of knowledge claims in the traditional or indigenous way. Indigenous epistemology refers to the unique ways of knowing, understanding, and interacting with the world that are rooted in the cultures, histories, and experiences of Indigenous peoples. It encompasses diverse knowledge systems, including spiritual, cultural, and traditional practices passed down through generations. It is an approach that is grounded in the cultural values, teachings, and traditions of Indigenous or native communities (Osebor, 2024). This theory of knowledge is not just 'learning' for life; rather, it is 'living' that incorporates the cultural values of a people (Malin & Maidment, 2003). This epistemology is a conscious or unconscious way of knowing. It's about knowledge for the development of the individual to the fullest or maximum in the society in such a way that both enjoy maximum happiness and prosperity. This native-centric epistemology is configured to the advancement of an individual, his desires, and the needs of society, which remain an essential part of human nature. It is the cultural holistic development of the individual's experience and being self-reliant. (Thoma & Pawar, 2010) Therefore, epistemology for the indigenous is a decisive system aimed to bring about needed changes in the life of an individual.

Native-centric epistemology can be formal education, which means classroom-based education provided by trained teachers. It could also be viewed as knowledge normally

delivered by trained teachers in a systematic and intentional way within a school or academic environment. Formal education here means education provided by the colonial master (Eurocentric education). The major goal of native-centric education is to avert colonial dislocations. The term colonial refers to animals living in a colony, while dislocation means the disruption of the existing order (Magubane, 1971). In this sense, colonial dislocation is the disruption of the existing order in a colony. Colonialism refers to the practice of acquiring and control over a country or territory by a foreign power (Nwosu, 2023). It often involves settling colonies and exploiting the resources and people of the colonized regions. The history of colonialism spans from the 15th century to the mid-20th century, particularly associated with European powers such as Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Belgium. It involved both the settlement of colonies and the extraction of resources, along with the imposition of foreign political, economic and cultural systems (Anyangwe, 2005). This study is concern with native centric epistemology as a policy framework for decolonization of African identity

Literature on the African Native Centric Epistemology

The relational ontology is a clear affirmation that knowledge is relational; everything is interconnected — humans, animals, plants, spirits, and land. This is in contrast with Cartesian dualism in Western thought, which separates mind from body and humans from nature. An African-native-centric epistemological framework places African people and perspectives at the center of intellectual inquiry and education, rejecting the Eurocentric worldview that has dominated historical knowledge production. It will encourage African people to reclaim their own narratives and understandings of the world (Asante, 2020). Raising children in Africa with cultural values is inherently a philosophical endeavour, intricately tied to fundamental questions about African values, and the nature of African knowledge or reality in the education of the children. At its core, African native-centric ethics involve guiding young individuals through the complexities of life, helping them navigate their development into morally and intellectually competent adults (Monday et al. 2024). It typically advocates for knowledge systems and worldviews that are rooted in the cultural, social and spiritual practices of African communities. The African worldviews will be imparted to children through the exploration of oral traditions and storytelling methods of African cultures. This will help examine the consequences of colonialism and its impact on African knowledge and worldview, often focusing on the clash between indigenous knowledge and European systems (Ogede, 2001).

Holistic indigenous knowledge includes empirical, spiritual, emotional and communal dimensions and rejects the reductionism of Western scientific frameworks. African native-centric epistemology includes the study of how knowledge is gained, how to justify knowledge claims, and the role of knowledge in human life (Irikefe, n-d.). In Africa, parents play a crucial role in instilling family values such as respect for elders and ancestors, communalism, collective responsibility, interconnectedness of nature and spirituality, and respect for diversity as guiding principles for children (Renzaho et al., 2011). The moral development of children evolve from a pre-conventional level, such as the African native-centric epistemology, where children's sense of morality is shaped by their cultural or family values, to a post-conventional level, where they internalize the principles (Utami, 2024). African-native-centric epistemologies often reject the Western divide between mind and body, subject and object, or human and nature. Instead, they view knowledge as an integrated whole, where all parts of the universe—human beings, animals, plants, the environment, and the spiritual realm—are interrelated (KaZenzile, 2017). Knowledge is not

just about intellectual understanding but also about relationships and experiences. The Ubuntu philosophy, which is common in Southern Africa, emphasizes the interconnectedness of all people. I am because we are suggests that individual identity and knowledge are inseparable from the community and the broader social and spiritual fabric (Carson, 2009).

African Native-centric epistemology includes questions about the influence of nature versus nurture, the continuity of the self, and the impact of global communities on children. It is a philosophy of liberation that encourages Africans to create their own epistemic systems based on their historical, cultural, and social experiences (Matolino, 2008). The teaching of Native-centric epistemology influences children's identity formation through the values instilled by parents, the cultural and social context children are exposed to, spirituality, and the supernatural. Oral traditions and embodied knowledge passed through stories, ceremonies, rituals, and lived experiences. Validates memory, language, and intergenerational learning is central to knowledge production. This includes the interactions between the visible and the invisible world (Wane, 2011). This knowledge, often communicated through intermediaries such as traditional healers, parents or diviners, seen as rooted in a deeper spiritual truth that transcends the empirical world. This helps to establish authenticity, as heavily discussed by existentialist philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, pertaining to living in accordance with one's true self (Poellner, 2014). Parents face the challenge of encouraging their children to develop authentic selves while providing the necessary structure and guidance for indigenous values. Balancing freedom and responsibility is a central philosophical issue in parenting. This balance influences how children perceive their own agency and accountability. Teaching children about the consequences of their actions and the importance of accountability is a practical application of philosophical discussions about responsibility (Kazepides, 1978). Parents often use a variety of methods, from positive reinforcement to punitive measures, to instill a sense of accountability. Philosophers like Aristotle have long debated the role of virtue and character in responsible behavior, arguing that cultivating virtues through practice leads to moral and responsible individuals.

The Psychosocial Implication of Colonialism

Colonialism has had far-reaching and lasting effects on global politics, economics, cultures and societies. Scholars from a range of disciplines have analyzed colonialism, examining not only its exploitative nature but also its profound psychological, social and cultural consequences. The process of decolonization remains a critical area of study, as the impacts of colonialism continue to shape the contemporary world, influencing everything from political borders to social identities. Colonialism has had a profound and long-lasting effect on education in Africa. Although it presented opportunities for marginalized groups (Hritulea & Nielsen, 2011), during colonial times, colonial powers often restricted education for indigenous populations, providing limited access to schooling, especially for the lower classes and marginalized communities. The people of Africa have been brutally traumatized (Monday, 2020a). Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) – *The Wretched of the Earth* argued the psychological implications colonialism. It dehumanizes both the colonizers and the colonized and that violent struggle was necessary to achieve true liberation from colonial oppression because the European colonizers denigrated (Fanon, et al., 1963). Nigerian education for centuries as “sub-human” and denied them recognition of any meaningful intellectual, cultural, and historical accomplishments or experiences, African people had no

history, culture, civilization, and nothing of value to contribute to the creation of human beings (Catala, 2024).

Native-centric epistemology is non-violence designed to serve the needs of the colonizers, perpetuating social hierarchies that led to racism through education of the children (Weiner, 2016). Systemic racism continues to impact not only children's education but also creates barriers for minority groups, such as African Americans in the U.S. or Indigenous communities globally, limiting their access to quality education and perpetuating miseducation of Black individuals. Historically, segregated schools, discriminatory policies and lack of resources have made it difficult for marginalized communities to thrive educationally (Kantor & Brenzel, 1992). The education systems under colonial rule often erased or marginalized local cultures, languages and histories, replacing them with the dominant colonial powers' culture and history. Indigenous knowledge systems were often ignored or devalued (Shizha, 2013), perpetuating the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives in education. The curriculum often centers on the history and contributions of predominantly white societies while neglecting the achievements and perspectives of non-white communities. This can lead to feelings of inferiority and alienation for students of color (Shizha, 2013). Mis-education is one of the tools used for colonial dislocations of the African people. Africans are still being educated away from their culture and history through Eurocentric curriculum and literature that erodes African identity such as African language. Hevešiová (2014) cited Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o that the psychological effects of colonialism continued after independence, particularly through language. The imposition of European languages and the suppression of indigenous languages were tools of colonial control and that true decolonization required a return to African languages and cultures. Native-centric epistemology acts as a cure for all forms of colonial dislocations through reconstruction, reorientation, and liberating Africans from subjugation and hegemonies, while placing Africans at the center of historical and cultural analysis of experiences (Shizha, 2013).

The system of education under colonial rule encourages the underrepresentation of non-white cultures in textbooks, media and classroom discussions, contributing to a lack of cultural pride and connection for students of color. This erasure can negatively affect their sense of identity, self-worth and economic exploitation, which disproportionately affected the education of colonized people. Identity Crisis refers to a period of uncertainty and confusion about one's self-identity, often characterized by a struggle to reconcile one's true self (Cameron & Kulick, 2005). Rethinking and decolonizing biases is crucial for modeling inclusive behavior. It is important for parents to remain steadfast despite the post-colonial influences and educate their children about native—centric epistemology. Although the ethical and emotional challenges of racism colonialism and children's struggles, can lead to a more nuanced understanding of complex moral issues. Parents may develop a greater capacity for empathy, patience, and resilience, reflecting a lived philosophical practice that integrates native centric epistemologies with real-world experience (Morelli et al. 2018).

After colonial rule ended, many formerly colonized nations and their educational systems were left impoverished identity crisis (Osebor, 2024c). Epistemological inequalities persist, often along racial lines. Black, Indigenous and other minority groups face higher levels of poverty and unemployment, which directly influence access to education (Prah, 2018). These communities often attend underfunded schools, resulting in poorer educational outcomes. The colonial education system often reinforced a sense of inferiority among colonized peoples, including their children, with native students being taught that

their cultures and histories were inferior (Pra, 2018). This has led to generational trauma and a lack of educational empowerment. In racist educational systems, students of color may face discrimination, prejudice and lower expectations from teachers and peers. This can lead to lower academic performance, lower self-esteem among children, and a sense of disconnection from the educational system (Shizha, 2013). However, the post-colonial epistemological system often faces the challenge of rebuilding education systems and rise of racism. Howe, (2008) reviewed Aime Césaire *Discourse on Colonialism* that colonialism is brutality and has a devastating effect on both the colonizer and the colonized. The role of colonialism in the rise of racism was not a "civilizing mission" but a process that destroyed cultures and identities. In addition, colonialism and racism have shaped educational systems in ways that continue to affect marginalized communities today (Regmi, 2022). While progress has been made, these systems of inequality remain deeply entrenched in many societies. The impact on education is not just about access but also about representation, cultural validation and the psychological well-being of students. Addressing the legacies of colonialism and racism requires a concerted effort to reform education systems, promote inclusivity and prioritize the voices and experiences of historically oppressed groups.

Native-Centric Epistemology: A Theory of Social Change

Native-centric epistemology is a philosophy of liberation for Africans, involving the unlearning and internalization of colonial worldviews. It is often associated with community-based knowledge production by people historically marginalized or suppressed by colonialism or Western hegemony. This study proposes a government policy strategy for language revitalization and the recovery of suppressed African identities through the teaching and learning of Native-centric epistemology. Government policy should recognize the broader African struggle for cultural and political liberation, aiming to support sovereignty and cultural restoration that align with indigenous laws. Governance systems must incorporate legal pluralism that recognizes indigenous legal systems alongside national laws for decision-making processes in local and national governance. This approach should champion African identity and self-determination. For instance, Cheikh Anta Diop and Frantz Fanon are key figures who championed the recognition of African identity and epistemological systems as integral to the decolonization process. African native–centric epistemology is an act of reclaiming African knowledge systems from Western dominance (Diop, 2013). African governments must encourage inclusive education, parenting to shape the next generation of children with African values alone. It is a profound philosophical outlook for parents to raise children by rethinking their own beliefs, values, and assumptions (Verbos & Humphries, 2014). Inclusive education will be repositories of African religious knowledge and cultural heritage to foster a sense of identity (Osebor, 2024).

Policy makers across Africa must engage in educational reforms, curriculum decolonization, and integrating indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and histories to embrace epistemological pluralities (Osebor, 2024b). African pedagogical methods such as the use of storytelling, land-based learning, and mentorship models should be prioritized in African policies over purely Eurocentric classroom models that invalidate indigenous knowledge in academic and professional settings. The African native-centric epistemological policy must embrace diversity and ensure that all children feel valued and understood, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or identities (Banks, 2012). This approach is crucial in decolonizing and shaping children into empathetic, open-minded individuals who respect and celebrate differences. However, there is a risk of indigenous knowledge being

commodified, theoretical, and abstract without proper recognition or benefits due to modernization, which has caused a loss of language and traditional knowledge among younger generations. The policy strategies of a native-centric epistemology will integrate African knowledge systems, which tied to everyday life. This knowledge system specially embodied by elders or "sages," and is passed down through life experiences rather than through abstract, theoretical frameworks. The idea of "Ajuwaya" in Nigerian Yoruba culture refers to the wisdom and knowledge gained from lived experience, which is valued alongside intellectual

Native-centric epistemology may grapple with unconscious biases due to racism but can help in locally developing moral personhood aimed at raising children in line with their cultural values. Policymakers should encourage the deliberate transmission of cultural heritage, enabling individuals to distinguish right from wrong conduct in society (Osebor & Irabor, 2023). Although colonial systems devalued indigenous knowledge, labeling it as superstition or primitive, policies in education, law, and science reinforced Eurocentric supremacy. Indigenous practices and beliefs are affected by globalization, but they offer a holistic view of life where individuals are raised with a deep understanding of their cultural heritage, responsibility to the community, respect for the environment, and spiritual connections to the world around them.

Conclusion

This study discussed African Native-centric epistemology. It emphasizes a deep respect for culture, nature, community and spirituality in the acquisition of knowledge. It proposed African native centric epistemology as a tool for decolonizing identity through teaching and learning of indigenous values that must be embedded in African policies. The objective of the paper is with to suggest to policymakers the unbiased implementation of African Native-centric epistemology to promote a sense of responsibility, emotional well-being, and a profound connection to the world, ensuring that children are not only educated but also raised as well-rounded, compassionate, and responsible individuals. Native-Centric Epistemology therefor offers not just an academic critique but a practical framework for addressing the enduring legacies of colonialism. It empowers Indigenous communities to reclaim their sovereignty, redefine development on their terms and heal from historical trauma. When embedded into policy frameworks, it transforms how societies govern, educate, heal and sustain themselves. Addressing colonialism is not simply a matter of restitution but a reconfiguration of the very knowledge systems that govern society — moving from extraction to reciprocity, from dominance to relationship, and from fragmentation to wholeness. The study found that the rationale for the identity crisis among children is the impact of colonialism, which relegates collective wisdom and the belief that children's growth is best nurtured within a community of support, understanding and shared values. Native-centric epistemology in inclusive parenting is not just about raising children who are accepting; it's about equipping them to be advocates for equity and justice. It concludes that by embracing diversity and fostering understanding, parents can help cultivate a generation that values inclusivity, empathy, and respect for all individuals through the practice, learning, and teaching of African native-centric epistemology.

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