

Review Article

Idealism and Education: Its Major Tenets and African Perspective

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical analysis of the philosophy of Idealism-and its application to education-juxtaposed with an examination of its tensions and congruities within traditional African philosophical frameworks. Rooted in the Western canon (e.g., Plato, Kant, Hegel), Idealism asserts the primacy of mind, spirit, or ideas as fundamental reality. Its core educational tenets advocate for the development of the intellect, the transmission of perennial truths and ethical values, a teacher-centred pedagogy with the instructor as a moral exemplar, and a curriculum that privileges intellectual disciplines designed to discipline the mind and spirit. When viewed through the lens of African thought systems, a complex relationship emerges. A significant consonance is evident in the shared metaphysical orientation that recognizes a spiritual foundation of reality. This commonality yields a corresponding emphasis on education as a process of character formation and the preservation of ancestral wisdom. The venerated role of the teacher or elder, who serves as a custodian of knowledge, further aligns with the idealist paradigm. Nevertheless, profound divergences are also identifiable. Although spiritual, traditional African philosophies frequently exhibit a more pronounced pragmatic and communal imperative. Their focus rests on cultivating harmony within the social and natural world, rather than on a disembodied realm of abstract Forms. This distinction is critical: the idealist prioritization of the individual's intellectual journey stands in direct contrast to the African ontological emphasis on communality, relational existence, and the conception of knowledge as a collective good. The study ultimately contends that while Idealism provides a relevant analytical lens, it remains an incomplete model for interpreting the metaphysical and axiological foundations of African educational traditions. A comprehensive African philosophy of education thus integrates idealist emphases on ethics and spirit with a uniquely pragmatic, communal, and holistic orientation, fundamentally directed toward the concrete sustenance and flourishing of the community.

Keywords

Idealism, Education, Tenets, Reality and Philosophical Scrutiny

1. Introduction

Idealism is a philosophical approach that interprets all existence through the lens of the mind and its functions. As Louis Ants explains, it refers to any theory that prioritizes the mind as the fundamental reality. Idealism is a philosophical

doctrine that emphasizes the primacy of the mind, ideas, or spirit over material reality. Idealism is one of the oldest philosophical systems, originating in ancient and later developed by Plato in the West. It prioritizes the human spirit as life's

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most essential element and views the universe as fundamentally nonmaterial. Despite variations among Idealist philosophers, they agree on two key principles: the supremacy of the human spirit and the nonmaterial nature of reality. Importantly, philosophical Idealism focuses on the primacy of mind, soul, or spirit, not merely the pursuit of high aspirations. It holds that reality is fundamentally mental or spiritual in nature, and the physical world is either dependent upon or shaped by the mind (Ozmon, H. A., & Craver, S. M.). In education, idealism focuses on the development of the mind, moral values, and self-realization as the ultimate goals of learning.

Philosophers such as Plato, Immanuel Kant, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel are notable contributors to idealist thought. Plato, for instance, viewed education as a means to bring the soul closer to truth and goodness, stressing the role of the teacher in guiding learners toward eternal ideals, [16]. For idealists, the term "mind" can have various meanings it may refer to the spiritual aspect of human beings, a person's conscious self or personality (distinct from the physical body), or the intellectual and reasoning faculties that define mental or spiritual existence.

The roots of this philosophy trace back to Plato, [17], the ancient Greek thinker who was one of its earliest and most influential advocates. Other philosophers linked to idealism include Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), who proposed a universe of spiritual "monads"; Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), whose pantheism hinted at a mind-like cosmos; and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the founder of transcendental idealism, which argues that reality is shaped by the mind's structures. Later thinkers like Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) and G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) developed subjective and absolute idealism, respectively, while Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) reimagined reality as a manifestation of irrational Will. Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) later blended idealism with process philosophy.

Some figures on this list, however, are not strictly idealists: René Descartes (1596–1650) was a dualist, separating mind and matter; Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) saw mind and matter as attributes of a single substance (God/Nature); Francis Bacon (1561–1626) was an empiricist focused on material science; and Alfred Adler (1870–1937) was a psychologist, not a metaphysician. Though their ideas sometimes overlap with idealism, their primary philosophies diverge from its core tenets.

2. Idealism and Education

In their ethical theory, idealists often stress the absolute nature of moral laws, a perspective prominently articulated in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant argued that every individual possesses inherent dignity and must be treated as an end in themselves. He focused on the intentions behind actions, asserting that true morality depends on goodwill. Idealists view values as structured into a fixed hierarchy, broadly divided into material and spiritual categories. When

ranking these values, their primary criterion is how well each helps individuals achieve their ultimate purpose. Since the idealist believes humanity's highest aim is unity with a spiritual reality, spiritual values take precedence.

According to Bagudo [2], Idealists also emphasize the cultivation of virtue, considering evil not merely a societal transgression but a disruption of universal harmony, as it introduces disorder. In education, they advocate reinforcing virtuous behaviour through rewards while correcting indiscipline with appropriate consequences. Students should be instilled with timeless, transcendental values that align with humanity's eternal destiny.

3. The Nature of Reality: Philosophical Perspectives

The question "What is the nature of reality?" has led to diverse philosophical viewpoints. Idealists, for instance, argue that reality is fundamentally spiritual or mental in nature. They prioritize mind over matter, granting it a superior status. Plato addressed this question by proposing a dualistic reality comprising the world of senses (material, transient things) and the world of Forms (eternal, unchanging truths). For Plato, true knowledge does not come from sensory experience, as the physical world is fleeting and imperfect. Instead, genuine understanding arises from the world of Forms, which exists independently and can only be grasped by the mind. The objects we perceive in the material world are mere imperfect copies of these ideal Forms, meaning sensory reality is only a shadow of the true, immutable reality.

Centuries later, René Descartes approached the nature of reality through radical doubt, famously declaring, "*Cogito, ergo sum*" ("I think, therefore I am"). He reasoned that doubt itself confirms existence, as doubt requires thought, and thought implies a thinking self. Like Plato, Descartes concluded that truth resides in reason and the mind, not in sensory illusions. He viewed the self (the mind) as the primary reality, capable of grasping a priori truths innate ideas that possess absolute certainty, unlike the deceptive perceptions of the senses.

4. Idealist Epistemology and the Socratic Method

Idealists argue that knowledge is innate (a priori), contrasting with empiricists, who claim knowledge comes from experience (a posteriori). For idealists, true cognition does not arise from the sensory world but from the world of Forms an eternal realm where knowledge pre-exists. Thus, learning is not acquiring new information but recollecting forgotten truths. The teacher's role is to guide students in rediscovering this latent knowledge through questioning, analysis, and synthesis, a method famously employed by Socrates.

Socrates, though claiming no personal wisdom, empha-

sized critical inquiry to uncover truth. Plato formalized his approach into three stages:

- 1) Opinion Stage: Gathering diverse (and often biased) viewpoints from learners.
- 2) Analytic Stage: Systematically dismantling these opinions through rigorous questioning, exposing contradictions until the learner admits ignorance.
- 3) Synthesis Stage: Constructing genuine knowledge from refined, logically sound conclusions.

This process filters out subjective biases, leading to objective, rational understanding the essence of idealist education.

For Plato, truth is a product of the mind, attainable through intellectual rigor rather than sensory experience. To cultivate this understanding, he designed an education system focused on training philosopher-kings' future rulers capable of governing his envisioned ideal state. This society was structured into three classes: rulers (guided by wisdom), warriors (defenders of order), and producers (labourers). Justice, according to Plato, depended on each class fulfilling its role for the collective good, with education primarily shaping the ruling elite.

Plato's value system emphasized two key dimensions:

- 1) The Individual: He championed the life of reason as the highest human pursuit, achievable through disciplines like philosophy, mathematics, and harmonics (the study of harmony in music and mathematics).
- 2) The Soul: Following Socrates, Plato stressed "care of the soul" manifested in self-knowledge and self-control as essential to ethical and rational living.

Plato believed that governance is a specialized skill, requiring rulers to possess both wisdom and moral authority. The ideal state, he argued, must be led by the best individuals those whose souls are driven by reason, self-discipline, and a commitment to truth. Such rulers apply rational principles not only to governance but also to their own conduct.

To cultivate these qualities, education must: Develop reason as the guiding force in thought and action, foster a love for theoretical knowledge, free from subjective biases and Instil clarity of purpose and the moral strength to pursue it. Plato recognized that human potential varies people differ in their intellectual capacities and willingness to serve the common good. Thus, education should be tailored to each individual's innate abilities, nurturing their unique strengths to benefit society.

5. Idealism's Perspective on Education

Idealists' perspective on Education is heavily influenced by their views about mind or spirit and idea. For example, spiritual development is considered an important educational aim because man has a soul which is not only the closest to the spiritual realm but is also a part of it. It is also superior to the material body. Accordingly, the aim of education is basically to strengthen the link between man's soul with this Ultimate Reality by developing him spiritually. Idealists also place emphasis on character development which largely demands

that individuals conform to long accepted norms and values of a given society.

However, character, as conceived by idealists, includes both the development of will power, as well as a sense of loyalty and duty. The development of will of power demands on the part of the students a high capacity to live in accordance with societal expectations. This involves not only effort or determination but also considerable sacrifice, [7]. The same applies to the development of a sense of loyalty and duty, for in a way these demand that an individual accepts and subjects himself to the expectations of a larger interest than his.

The culture of a people represents the accumulated wisdom of past generations. It represents, one many say, the soul of a society because it includes those things that have enabled individuals in such societies survive as a people. Thus, a central aim of education is to transmit this accumulated culture to all coming generations. An individual cannot adequately survive in a society without the necessary tools which are contained in his culture. Cultural transmission is also related to the idea of loyalty for it demands that by imbibing the culture of its people one will become integrated into the society in which he exists or finds himself.

The inclusion of self-realization as an educational aim is made necessary by the notion of the self and considerable emphasis idealists attach to it. Thus, man has within this self a certain endowment, the source of which is the Ultimate self. In this way, an education system worth its name must strive to realize this self in man.

Furthermore, due to the importance of mind in both its metaphysics and epistemology, it would imply that the primary concern in idealist education is intellectual development. Man is endowed with powers of thinking, of reasoning and of imagination, which together enable him appreciate the world and together they make him truly man, as distinct from other creatures. Intellectual development is on this account an important educational aim.

6. Idealists Curriculum: A Focus on Timeless Knowledge and Moral-cognitive Development

According to idealist philosophy, the curriculum should be designed to foster students' moral, intellectual, and spiritual development. Idealism holds that reality is founded on concepts, timeless truths, and universal principles; therefore, the curriculum should reflect these enduring ideas rather than transient or purely practical knowledge, [15], Ozmon, H. A., & Craver, S. M). Idealist teachers emphasize disciplines that cultivate intellectual and ethical growth, particularly philosophy, classical literature, history, the arts, and religious studies. These subjects are considered essential for exposing students to humanity's greatest intellectual and cultural achievements (Brubacher, J. S.).

Plato had conceived the world as being separated into a

phenomenal world or the world of the senses and the transcendental or the world of ideas or form. He further narrated that man can only hope to enter or understand the nature of the world of Good by freeing himself from the material world and this has the simple implication that he would concentrate less on things that have to do with the material world while concentrating more on those related to the world of forms.

An idealist curriculum integrates ethical instruction through the study of philosophical traditions, enduring moral texts, and Socratic dialogue. The aim is to guide students toward transcendent values such as truth, justice, and aesthetic perfection (Plato, *Republic*, trans. 2000 [1]. The idealist curriculum emphasizes those subjects which will more likely enable an individual appreciate the nature of the eternal world of ideas or form and this means both a concern for ideas over facts as well as spiritual over physical or material awareness. The subjects must, apart from enabling individuals understand their physical environment, take them beyond this.

While idealists value mathematics and the sciences, they do so primarily for their role in developing abstract reasoning and revealing the universe's inherent order, rather than for their technical applications [2]. Consequently, mathematics forms the basis of idealist curriculum because it dealt more with ideas than observable facts of the universe. It is also on the basis of such a consideration that music is included in the curriculum, for music properly conceived takes the individual away from the immediate to the transcendental and eternal. Language skills are also included in the curriculum because apart from the fact that they introduce the individual into this culture, they also represent one of the most reliable means of attaining intellectual development. For instance, the mental arithmetic is good exercise for the faculty of memory, object lessons for perceptions, literature for imagination, and diagramming and parsing sentences for reasons.

Teachers in this tradition act as custodians of knowledge, selecting canonical texts and structuring curriculum around seminal ideas that have shaped civilization. Their role is to mediate between students and the "great conversation" of human thought. Generally, idealists believe that there is a body of truth to be transmitted to each succeeding generation and to all who come to school. This body of truth is to be found in the various traditional subjects in schools [1]. The curriculum on account of this is subject and discipline centred because in a sense individuals are compelled to learn a body of knowledge whose value has long been decided. It is also teacher centred because its planning and implementation is done without consideration of those meant to benefit from it because the teachers who represent the society have knowledge of these subjects that the students do not have.

Idealist pedagogy rejects narrow vocational training in favour of "permanent studies" knowledge that remains relevant across historical periods. This contrasts sharply with pragmatic approaches that prioritize adaptability to contemporary economic demands. The curriculum emphasizes comprehensive development through the study of enduring philosophical

concepts, ethical principles, and humanity's intellectual heritage. By grounding teachers in a discipline-based framework, it cultivates wisdom and moral character, preparing students or learners for reflective and principled living.

7. Teaching Methods

Idealists recommend many methods of teaching. These include the questioning or Socratic method, lecture method, memorization, imitation and self-learning. In all, they know that whichever method is used should be such as is capable of strengthening the mind and furnishing it with knowledge. For this reason, mental drills are greatly encouraged.

According to Plato, man has knowledge in his soul but his is shielded from awareness by his own imperfect material body. Hence, every man has a responsibility to search his soul for all true knowledge. In schools, idealists should recommend the use of questioning method. Such questions provoke thinking which in turn succeed in bringing out of the individual the knowledge that is already within.

The lecture method is esteemed for its capacity to organize and present ideas in a logical and systematic manner, thereby enabling students to discern the coherence of concepts across successive lessons. Although it exemplifies unity in teaching, it should not be confined to a unidirectional process; rather, students ought to be actively engaged through structured discussion in order to deepen understanding and facilitate meaningful learning.

Now, the Socratic and lecture methods are both encouraged because they aid towards strengthening the mind and furnishing it with knowledge, respectively. As Brooks cited in Enon has admitted, the teacher puts the knowledge that is in his own mind into the minds from their pupils and also develops knowledge in their minds from their own original sources of knowing.

Idealist philosophy underscores imitation as a valuable pedagogical method. This is particularly pertinent to the moral formation of learners, since the teacher is not merely a transmitter of knowledge but also a determinant of behaviour. Consequently, the teacher is expected to embody exemplary conduct and intellectual distinction, thereby functioning as a model for students to emulate.

In summary, idealist pedagogy places strong emphasis on the centrality of self-learning. Since learning occurs within the individual, it is regarded as a personal and internal process. The role of the teacher is therefore limited to providing resources and guidance, while the responsibility for actual learning rests primarily with the learner. Accordingly, instructional approaches such as the project method, which prioritize learner initiative and self-directed activity, are strongly advocated within this philosophical tradition.

7.1. Teacher and Learner Responsibilities

In the idealist philosophy of education, the teacher occupies a central position because of the multiple roles he plays in the life of the student. Primarily, he serves as a spiritual guide, helping learners to recognize the spiritual dimension underlying all knowledge rather than perceiving themselves merely as physical beings without purpose. More importantly, the teacher is expected to exemplify the highest human virtues, providing a model for students to emulate. In addition, the teacher functions as a disciplinarian, ensuring that learners acquire discipline, since moral development is hardly possible without it.

The teacher also acts as an intermediary between the cultural heritage of society, which embodies life's essential truths, and the learner. In this capacity, he assumes the role of a cultural guide, responsible for selecting relevant subject matter and determining effective methods of instruction, while recognizing that the ultimate task of learning lies with the student. To achieve this, the teacher must engage learners in activities that require analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and application of knowledge to practical life, since knowledge acquires significance only when it bears relevance to human experience. However, such outcomes demand that the teacher himself demonstrate thorough expertise and competence in the subject he teaches.

While teachers play a leading role in education, learners also bear significant responsibility. Despite their immaturity and need for guidance, students must cultivate self-discipline and restraint if they are to achieve meaningful growth and adulthood. According to Enoch "to be human means, having attained a level of habitual conduct that is in agreement with the routines and habits of civilization at that level of progress". It is small wonder that learners in the idealist curriculum have to be forced to learn a common core subject matter. They are expected to be working and disciplined in order to learn whatever the teacher hands down to them.

7.2. The Institutional Responsibility of the School

The school plays a vital role in fostering spiritual growth and character formation, which depend on teachers' guidance and an environment that consistently reflects the virtues it seeks to instill. The emphasis on creating a conducive environment for character development implies that the school cannot remain passive by leaving each learner to develop independently. Although the general atmosphere of the school significantly influences personality growth, this alone is inadequate; therefore, the school must also be firmly rooted in discipline.

Another Responsibility of the school is to transmit the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of past generations to learners. In this capacity, the school serves as a mediator between the cultural traditions and intellectual heritage of

society and the developing child. Although children may be unaware of these traditions, they require them for successful integration into society. It is therefore the school's responsibility to preserve this heritage and pass it on to future generations.

According to Strain, as cited in Enoch, the idealist view of the school emphasizes the continuity of discipline from the home into the educational setting. Such discipline should be rational, requiring that every misconduct be clearly identified, explained, and followed by appropriate consequences. The school day is therefore characterized more by order than spontaneity, with learners being trained in desirable habits such as cleanliness, neatness, punctuality, orderliness, courtesy, obedience, quickness, and accuracy.

8. Assessment of Idealist in Education: Strengths

The idealist emphasis on character and moral development is crucial as it cultivates in individuals an appreciation of proper conduct and respect for others, which are essential for peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, education, regardless of its form, entails the acquisition of knowledge that advances human progress. Within this context, the idealist focus on cognitive development is significant, as it strengthens the power of reason, which is fundamental to understanding the world.

In an increasingly materialistic world where humanity often neglects the ultimate source of existence and its own higher place within creation, idealism offers a philosophy that affirms both the personal and spiritual dimensions of human life. It emphasizes that disloyalty, like indiscipline, poses serious threats to the survival of any community. Accordingly, idealism advocates for individual loyalty to the group, encouraging people to view themselves as integral parts of a larger whole, which is greater than its individual members. Many human conflicts stem from ignoring this principle, as it underscores that the world itself is a unified entity, with nations and races existing as parts of a broader global community.

The emphasis on cultural transmission is vital for maintaining societal stability, as passing traditions to younger generations equips them with the tools to address emerging challenges. Idealist philosophy views the child positively, regarding them as possessing a soul that is spiritual and connected to the larger spiritual universe. This perspective encourages teachers to adopt an optimistic outlook toward learners, fostering the belief that even those considered problematic can be transformed through proper guidance and education.

Many are drawn to idealism because of its systematic and comprehensive nature. Few philosophical traditions can rival its inclusiveness, as it seeks to account for all aspects of the universe within its framework. Each concept is carefully integrated into the system in a thorough and convincing way,

which contributes to its enduring appeal.

9. Criticisms

Idealism is often criticized for promoting conformity, conservatism, and an uncritical reliance on past traditions at the expense of individual judgment, innovation, and relevance to contemporary needs. While its focus on moral and spiritual development is commendable, its curriculum neglects practical concerns such as hunger, disease, and shelter, rendering it inadequate for addressing urgent human problems.

Teachers are often given excessive credit in the learning process, while students are undervalued. This perspective is flawed, as effective teaching not only relies on the teacher's preparation and delivery but also on the active engagement of learners. Without students' positive response to instructional materials, learning cannot occur. Therefore, designing curriculum content and teaching methods without considering learners' interests or involving them in the process restricts their ability to fully grasp what is being taught, [1].

Idealism has been widely criticized for its reliance on rote memorization, which prevents students from critically engaging with knowledge or applying it to real-life problems. Experimentalists reject its separation of the spiritual from the material, arguing that the spiritual cannot be experienced or proven, and that education should focus on the material world. The idealist view of the mind as a spiritual organ is also questioned, as its existence and operation cannot be verified. Similarly, the claim that virtues are eternal and objective is challenged, with critics maintaining that values are shaped by human needs and interests, and therefore change over time. Finally, idealism's coherence theory of truth is seen as limited, since not all truths depend on belonging to a larger system.

10. Tenets of Idealism in Education

Idealism is among the oldest and most influential philosophies in the history of education. Rooted in the works of Plato, it emphasizes the primacy of ideas and the mind over the material world. According to Plato, the physical world is an imperfect reflection of eternal truths, and the purpose of education is to lead learners toward the realization of these ideals [2]. Subsequent thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, and more modern philosophers expanded the framework, integrating ethics, aesthetics, and logic as essential components of the educational process.

1) Self-Realization and Spiritual Development

One of the core principles of idealism is that education should facilitate the development of the learner's inner self, enabling moral and spiritual growth. This process involves cultivating the student's ethical character alongside intellectual skills, fostering a holistic form of personal development that transcends mere vocational preparation. From Plato's perspective, education is a means to achieve self-realization,

or the discovery of one's true nature. He argued that people are inherently good, but that society and the material world often obscure our true essence. Education, then, should help individuals reconnect with their higher, spiritual selves by nurturing moral judgment and ethical understanding. This process of self-discovery and moral development is seen as integral to achieving a meaningful life.

2) Intellectual Development through Reasoning

Idealists maintain that reality is knowable through reason and reflective thought rather than sensory experience alone. Education, therefore, prioritizes abstract thinking, critical analysis, and engagement with universal truths. The curriculum often emphasizes philosophy, mathematics, and the humanities to sharpen reasoning abilities. The pursuit of beauty is not limited to the visual arts but extends to the appreciation of harmony and balance in all areas of life. For example, mathematics, often viewed as a purely logical subject, is also seen as a way to access beauty in its purest form. Idealists argue that education should not only impart knowledge but also foster an appreciation for the transcendent qualities of life, helping students to connect with something greater than themselves.

3) Cultural and Moral Transmission

Education serves as the medium through which societies transmit their accumulated moral, cultural, and intellectual heritage [3]. For idealists, this means placing a strong emphasis on classical literature, historical narratives, and ethical principles that have endured through time.

4) Reflective Teaching Methods

Teaching in an idealist framework often employs the Socratic method, lectures, and guided discussions that stimulate intellectual curiosity and moral reasoning [4]. The aim is not merely to transfer information but to lead students toward independent discovery of truth. In modern classrooms, Idealism encourages critical thinking, creativity, and personal growth. It promotes an education system where students are not just taught to memorize facts but to think deeply, question assumptions, and appreciate beauty and truth in all forms. For example, rather than focusing solely on technical or vocational training, Idealism advocates for an education that helps individuals become well-rounded, thoughtful, and compassionate human beings.

5) Teacher as Moral and Intellectual Guide

In idealist education, teachers serve as role models of intellectual integrity and moral virtue [5]. Their personal example is considered as influential as the content they deliver, embodying the ideals they wish to cultivate in students.

6) Discipline as a Path to Inner Freedom

Discipline in the idealist classroom is designed to develop self-control and responsibility, laying the foundation for intellectual and moral autonomy [6]. It is not about authoritarian control but about guiding students toward self-governance. An idealist curriculum is typically subject-centred and focuses on the humanities, fine arts, and sciences as pathways to understanding universal truths, [7]. Subjects are selected not for immediate practical application but for their capacity to nur-

ture the intellect and moral sense of the learner. In an Idealist educational framework, teachers are seen as guides or mentors who lead students on a journey of intellectual and moral development. They are not just instructors who impart facts, but facilitators who encourage students to explore higher truths and refine their character. The teacher-student relationship is essential, as the teacher is responsible for guiding the student's development on both intellectual and spiritual levels.

For Plato, education was deeply connected to the idea of philosophical leadership. Teachers should embody the virtues they teach, and their role is to inspire students to pursue wisdom and truth. In the Idealist classroom, teachers do more than just explain concepts; they encourage students to engage in self-reflection, question assumptions, and develop their own understanding of the world. This encourages a deeper, more meaningful connection to the subject matter and to the individual's personal growth.

Critics argue that idealism can be overly abstract, culturally conservative, and less adaptable to rapidly changing societal needs. However, proponents maintain that the emphasis on values, moral reasoning, and intellectual discipline remains relevant in an age dominated by technological and utilitarian education models, [8].

Idealism's enduring influence in education lies in its unwavering focus on cultivating the moral, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of learners. By prioritizing timeless truths, reflective thinking, and the moral example of teachers, it offers a counterbalance to purely utilitarian approaches, ensuring that education remains a deeply humanizing process.

11. African Philosophy of Education

African Philosophy can be described as a critical, rational and systematic reflection on the African experience, world views and problem confronting the content. For Sogolo cited in Olumide O. M and Awoyemi O. K, it is an academic discipline that combines significant features and sun themes from traditional African oral philosophy and contemporary African written Philosophy. The African Philosophy of Education for Elechi [9] posit "it is the process of initiating an Into activities that considered worthwhile which result in a desirable change that must not only seen to be international and deliberate but also directed toward a purpose. The purpose is the production of an educated man who would show evidence of total personality economically, politically, intellectually, socially and morally and be a contributor to the development of his society. This definition may have been informed by the views of Olumide and Awoyemi and it relates ontologically to the perception of traditional African society. They further corroborate this view in the proposition that in traditional African society, there is no system of education separate and distinct from the system of socialization.

In the light of these preliminary remarks, African philosophy of education may be construed as a systematic, rational

and critical reflection on the principles and practice of education in Africa and how the implementation of related policies can bring about effective development of the continent. African philosophy of Education is an academic discipline which involves understanding, explaining, analysing, examining, evaluating, commenting on, judging and being attentive to problems of and about education on the African content.

12. Idealism in African Philosophy of Education Traditions

Idealism within African philosophy presents a distinctive orientation when compared to its Western counterpart. Whereas Western idealism exemplified by thinkers such as Plato, with his theory of forms, or Hegel, with his notion of the absolute spirit tends to emphasize abstract reasoning and individual intellectual pursuit, African idealism is grounded in a more communal and pragmatic vision. It is shaped by ethical interdependence, spiritual interconnectedness, and the conviction that knowledge must ultimately contribute to moral development and social transformation. In this sense, African idealism prioritizes lived experience, oral traditions, and the cultivation of wisdom as tools for advancing collective well-being rather than merely theoretical speculation, [10, 11].

Principles of African Idealist Education

African educational traditions are profoundly shaped by idealist principles, particularly in the way they privilege communal values over individual pursuits. Education, in this context, extends beyond personal achievement; it is fundamentally concerned with nurturing and sustaining the life of the community. Knowledge is transmitted through collective practices such as storytelling, apprenticeship, and shared experiences, all of which strengthen social cohesion and ensure intergenerational continuity [12]. Moreover, the foundations of knowledge in African thought are inseparable from moral and spiritual values. Traditional educational practices emphasize respect for elders, harmonious coexistence with nature, and reverence for ancestors, underscoring the belief that true learning must be grounded in ethical responsibility and spiritual awareness [13].

Unlike many Western models that draw sharp distinctions between intellectual, moral, and practical training, African idealism emphasizes their integration. Learning is conceived as a holistic process in which the development of knowledge, character, and practical competence are inseparable. Indigenous apprenticeship systems such as those in blacksmithing or farming illustrate this approach, as they combine technical skill acquisition with ethical instruction and communal responsibility, [18].

13. African Philosophers on Idealist Education

Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa Philosophy: In Education for

Self-Reliance (1968), Julius Nyerere critiques colonial education for being elitist and disconnected from African social and cultural realities [14]. He advances an idealist model in which schools operate as micro-communities, fostering cooperation, self-sufficiency, and social responsibility. This vision reflects African idealism, as it emphasizes the integration of moral and practical learning over mere rote memorization, thereby aligning education with the broader goal of communal development and ethical growth.

John Mbiti on Spiritual and Ethical Knowledge: John Mbiti (1969) emphasizes that African education must encompass cosmological understanding, particularly how individuals relate to the divine, ancestors, and the natural world [15]. From his idealist perspective, education is not merely the transfer of skills or facts but a means of preserving cultural spirituality and ethical values. In this view, learning equips individuals to recognize their place within the cosmic order, fostering a deep sense of responsibility to both the community and the spiritual realm.

Kwame Gyekye's Communitarian Ethics: Kwame Gyekye (1995) argues that African education should be directed toward cultivating virtues such as reciprocity, humility, and solidarity [16]. His idealist stance critiques the individualism often associated with Western thought, advocating instead for a curriculum that strengthens communal identity and fosters ethical responsibility. In this way, Gyekye [17] situates education as both a moral and social enterprise, one that nurtures the individual while sustaining the collective well-being of the community.

14. Educational Insights for the 21st Century

African idealism challenges dominant Eurocentric education models by proposing alternatives as follows:

- 1) **Ethical Pedagogy**: Schools should give equal importance to character formation and academic learning, drawing on indigenous moral teachings to guide students toward ethical responsibility and social harmony [18].
- 2) **Community-Based Learning**: Education should actively involve elders and local knowledge-keepers, who serve as vital custodians of cultural wisdom. Their participation ensures the transmission of indigenous values, practices, and worldviews, thereby strengthening cultural continuity and grounding learning in lived community realities [19].
- 3) **Decolonized Curricula**: Formal education should intentionally incorporate African philosophies and knowledge systems as a way of challenging Western epistemological dominance. Doing so not only validates indigenous intellectual traditions but also promotes a more balanced and inclusive understanding of knowledge, empowering learners to engage with their cultural heritage while participating in global discourse [20].

15. Conclusion

Idealism, as a philosophical foundation of education, highlights the central role of ideas, values, and moral development in shaping both human character and society. In its Western formulations ranging from Plato's theory of forms to Hegel's notion of the absolute spirit idealism has often emphasized abstract reasoning and intellectual pursuit. By contrast, the African perspective grounds idealism in communal ethics, spirituality, and practical wisdom. Within African educational traditions, learning is understood as a holistic process that integrates intellectual, moral, and practical dimensions, always directed toward the collective well-being rather than individual advancement alone. The insights of thinkers such as Julius Nyerere, John Mbiti, and Kwame Gyekye [9], illustrate how African idealism is translated into concrete educational visions. Their philosophies underscore cooperation, ethical responsibility, cultural continuity, and spiritual awareness, reinforcing the idea that education should extend beyond knowledge acquisition to encompass the cultivation of virtue, the strengthening of communal identity, and the alignment of human life with a broader moral and cosmic order. In the context of contemporary education, the African idealist perspective provides vital guidance. It calls for the embedding of ethical pedagogy, the recognition of community-based learning, and the development of decolonized curricula that affirm indigenous philosophies. In this way, African idealism serves not only as a critique of Eurocentric models but also as a constructive framework for envisioning education that is holistic, human-centred, morally grounded, and socially transformative.

Author Contributions

Abdulkadir Muhammad Ruwah is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Biography

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