

Chapter 7

Education And Culture in Nigeria: Philosophical Foundations, Cultural Disconnect, And A Framework for Transformative Practice

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Abstract

Background: The relationship between education and culture is theoretically inseparable, yet in Nigeria, this bond remains profoundly problematic. Despite decades of educational reform, persistent cultural disconnects—manifesting in curricular irrelevance, language marginalisation, and systemic alienation—continue to undermine educational outcomes.

Objective: This conceptual paper critically examines the philosophical relationship between education and culture, analyses the current state of culture-education integration in Nigeria, identifies the consequences of cultural disconnect, and proposes a transformative framework for culturally grounded educational practice.

Methods: Employing critical philosophical analysis and synthesis of contemporary scholarship (2019–2026), the paper integrates classical educational theory, African Ubuntu philosophy, cultural lag theory, and recent empirical studies from the World Bank, UNESCO, and Nigerian research institutions.

Results: The analysis confirms that while education is both a product of culture and a primary mechanism for cultural transmission, Nigeria’s Western-derived system exhibits significant cultural disconnect. Key evidence includes: 20.2 million out-of-school children (UNICEF/UNESCO, 2026); a curriculum misaligned with local labour markets (World Bank, 2023); widespread graduate underemployment; accelerating brain drain (69% youth emigration desire); and growing youth cynicism (“school is a scam”). Cultural lag theory explains the widening gap between rapid technological change and sluggish ethical-cultural adaptation. Ubuntu philosophy offers a transformative framework emphasising interconnectedness, communal responsibility, and collective well-being. Innovations such as EduLab 360 (Afrocentric digital learning) and the World Bank’s AGILE programme (traditional leaders as educational advocates) demonstrate viable pathways forward.

Conclusion: Addressing Nigeria’s educational crisis requires not merely technical reforms but a fundamental reimagining of the education-culture relationship. The proposed framework integrates Ubuntu principles, addresses cultural lag through revitalised humanities education, leverages traditional leadership, embraces Afrocentric digital innovation, and develops contextually relevant curricula—enabling education that is simultaneously globally engaged and deeply rooted in Nigerian cultural realities.

Keywords: Education and culture, Ubuntu philosophy, cultural lag, Nigerian education, indigenous knowledge, cultural relevance, curriculum development, Afrocentric pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between education and culture is one of the most fundamental yet most problematic questions in educational philosophy. As Obot (2019) argues, "Culture and education are inseparable. Effective education, then, should respond importantly to cultural needs. On the contrary, education in Nigeria appears not to serve most of our cultural needs as it is in most cases, incapable of offering effective responses to social challenges" (p. 3). This observation, made over half a century after independence, points to a persistent and deepening crisis at the heart of Nigerian education.

Education is the product of culture, and its function is the transmission and preservation of culture. In addition, education leads to cultural changes and equips the individual to adjust to changing cultural patterns. Thus, education equips the individual for bringing about cultural changes and for constructing new cultural patterns (Amaele, 2003). Education is obviously a reflection of the social, cultural, and political conditions prevailing outside. It reflects society, but it has within it the seeds of the dynamics of change and can thus keep pace with a fast-changing world.

Yet in Nigeria, this dynamic relationship has broken down. The contemporary education system, largely inherited from colonial models and perpetuated without fundamental re-examination, operates in profound tension with the cultural realities of the society it purports to serve. This disconnect manifests in multiple crises: the highest number of out-of-school children globally—20.2 million according to a joint UNESCO and UNICEF report (Durueke, 2026; UNESCO & UNICEF, 2026); a curriculum increasingly misaligned with modern needs; graduates whose skills do not match labour market demands; accelerating brain drain as the educated flee a system that has failed them; and deepening youth disillusionment captured in the phrase "school is scam" circulating among young Nigerians who see educated relatives "battered by the system" (Durueke, 2026, para. 12).

These are not merely technical problems amenable to administrative fixes. They are symptoms of a deeper philosophical crisis—a failure to understand and act upon the fundamental relationship between education and the culture it should serve. As Omoregie and Ojo (2024) observe, "From the colonial era to the contemporary society, educational practices have changed because of the educational objectives that were set in responding to the changing society" (p. 85). But whose objectives? Responding to which society? These questions remain largely unanswered.

This conceptual paper undertakes a critical philosophical analysis of the relationship between education and culture, with specific reference to the Nigerian context. It draws upon classical educational theory, African philosophical traditions (particularly Ubuntu), recent scholarship on cultural lag, and contemporary Nigerian educational developments to construct a framework for understanding and addressing the cultural disconnect in Nigerian education.

The paper argues that authentic educational transformation requires not merely policy changes but a fundamental reimagining of how education relates to culture—a reimagining that recovers indigenous philosophical resources while engaging critically with global knowledge.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Defining Culture and Education

Culture refers to the total patterns of a society's life. It is composed of integrated customs, traditions, and current behaviour patterns of a human group. It is that complex whole which includes the customs, beliefs, laws, traditions, knowledge, morals, etc., acquired by a person as a member of society (Amaele, 2003). Culture, society, norms, and standards that a society develops over many generations profoundly influence the everyday behaviour of people in that society.

On the other hand, education can be considered a technique while culture is a value. Education leads towards more creative, enhanced, perpetuated values—i.e., culture. Vocation is the utilitarian pursuit of education, considered as material culture. Culture is more concerned with the non-material aspects of society than the material aspects. Nevertheless, right education should maintain a balance between the material and non-material aspects of society (Amaele, 2003).

The Dynamic Interplay

Education plays a very important role in the transmission of culture from generation to generation. Whenever there is a human group, there is culture—a man-made part of the environment and learned patterns of behaviour. People follow established customs which limit and focus the range of their individual choices, via dressing, eating, valuing, believing, etc. Education and culture cannot be separated or divorced from each other as they are very much dependent on each other, and one influences the other (Amaele, 2003).

The implications of culture for education are profound. Social living is influenced by education, and education itself is governed by social life. The total pattern of a society's life determines education, and education moulds the total pattern of society's life. Education produces a cultured person and is also nurtured by the cultured person.

The intimate relationship between culture and education is evident from the fact that one of the major aims of education is to impart to the child their cultural heritage—the social heritage. It is through education that the culture of the group is communicated to the child, thereby acquainting them with the traditions, customs, values, and patterns of conduct prevailing in their group. This knowledge enables them to adapt to the social environment and thus achieve their socialisation (Amaele, 2003). The child's cultural education begins at home, and it is in the family that they participate in the elements of culture, with parents and other members of the family educating the child in the various means of culture such as traditions, customs, values, and beliefs.

Education as Cultural Transmission and Transformation

The process of transmission of culture, formally or informally, refers to the education of the child. Transmission of cultural patterns is one of the important functions of education. It is through the medium of education that the elements of culture are handed down to the next generation. The school is a significant formal agency that transmits culture to the younger generation. Customs and traditions, rules of etiquette, and manners are taught both by instruction and by example. It trains students in regional and national culture.

Culture is constituted of norms, customs, traditions, and rules of behaviour. All these are reflected in the social life of the school. The school pays attention to transmitting the refined elements of culture, and this is done through various means of socialisation. Therefore, education helps in the transmission of culture.

However, education is not only concerned with the transmission of culture; it also builds new cultural patterns. It brings changes to the existing culture. These changes are necessitated by cross-cultural contacts or by the building of new knowledge. The individual is equipped to bring cultural changes to meet their needs in a changing environment and is prepared to adjust their life to the world in which they were born or are living.

Therefore, it is education that brings the needed and desirable changes in cultural values and ideals for the progress of society. Education helps to determine what needs to be transmitted in the light of the present and future needs of society. Education is not only concerned with simple transmission, but its importance lies in preparing the child to meet the needs of society. Since society is continually changing, it also needs to go on changing. It is for meeting the changing needs and for bringing about desirable changes in society that education is needed (Amaele, 2003).

THE NIGERIAN CRISIS: CULTURAL DISCONNECT IN EDUCATION

The Colonial Legacy and Its Persistence

Western-oriented education was intimately bound up with the introduction of Christianity into Nigeria. Missionary societies established the Western type of education based on the three pillars on which instruction in religious matters rested—Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic (Faleye, 2013). The planting of Western education witnessed the erosion of the age-old indigenous education. As Faleye (2013) argues, "While Western education served the need of the colonial society, it was dysfunctional in the post-colonial era" (p. 15).

This dysfunction persists today. The Nigerian education system continues to operate on philosophical foundations inherited from colonialism, with curricula, pedagogies, and assessment methods that bear little relation to Nigerian cultural realities. The result, as Obot (2019) argues, is that "some aspects of our education do not reflect Nigerian culture as the case should be" (p. 4).

The Out-of-School Children Crisis

The most visible manifestation of this cultural disconnect is the staggering number of children excluded from formal education. According to a joint UNESCO and UNICEF report, 20.2 million Nigerian children are out of school—the highest number globally (Durueke, 2026;

UNESCO & UNICEF, 2026). This is not merely an access problem but a cultural problem. For many communities, particularly in northern Nigeria, formal education is perceived as alien, threatening to cultural and religious values.

As the World Bank's AGILE programme documentation reveals, "For generations, prevailing norms in northern Nigeria have prioritised domestic roles for girls over education. Marriage, household responsibilities, and cultural expectations often take precedence over girls' education" (World Bank, 2025, para. 3). Traditional leaders, once seen as custodians of cultural norms resistant to formal education, have become advocates for change—but their involvement itself testifies to the cultural distance between the education system and the communities it serves.

The Skills Mismatch and Youth Unemployment

For those who persevere through the system, the reward is often disillusionment. A 2023 World Bank report on Nigeria's skills gap found a significant mismatch between graduate skills and employer demands, particularly in technology and problem-solving competencies (Durueke, 2026). The curriculum is increasingly misaligned with modern needs. In a world racing toward artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and green technology, Nigerian universities often mandate courses irrelevant to modern labour markets.

This mismatch fuels the cynical view among youth that "school is scam" (Durueke, 2026, para. 18). Young Nigerians see educated relatives unemployed or underemployed, reinforcing the perception that the system has betrayed them. Tope Adeyemi, a 24-year-old first-class graduate unemployed for two years, captures this sentiment: "We were told education was the key, but the lock has been changed. The system trains us for an economy that has moved on" (Durueke, 2026, para. 19).

The Brain Drain Crisis

Faced with this dead end, the skilled are fleeing. A 2023 poll by the African Polling Institute found 69% of Nigerians would emigrate, if possible, with youth leading this desire (Durueke, 2026). The UK Home Office reported that sponsored study visas for Nigerians granted in the year ending June 2022 saw a 222% increase from the prior year—a trend that has remained high. Doctors, engineers, and academics are leaving.

This brain drain is not merely an economic loss but a cultural tragedy. It represents the flight of the very human capital Nigeria most needs, and it deepens the cycle of cultural disconnect—those most capable of transforming the system are those most likely to abandon it.

The Paradox of Celebration

The crisis is compounded by a profound cultural dissonance in what society celebrates. As Durueke (2026) observes, "While top graduates face a barren job market, the loudest applause is frequently reserved for entertainment and spectacle, a dissonance that deepens youth disillusionment" (para. 24). The celebration of form over substance, of luck over labour, sends a powerful message about what the culture truly values.

This is not the problem itself, but a symptom of a deeper malaise. When the public narrative is saturated with stories of corruption—such as the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) reporting \$42 billion lost in the oil and gas sector over a decade—a warped moral calculus takes hold. As a former student in Ibadan put it, "When you see impunity rewarded, you start to believe the system teaches that integrity is for losers" (Durueke, 2026, para. 25).

UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY: A TRANSFORMATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURALLY GROUNDED EDUCATION

The Meaning of Ubuntu

Recent scholarship has turned to Ubuntu philosophy as a resource for reimagining Nigerian education. Ubuntu, rooted in African communal values, emphasizes interconnectedness, shared humanity, and collective well-being. As Okpara et al. (2025) argue, Ubuntu "provides a framework for a more inclusive, culturally relevant, and socially responsive education system. It shifts the purpose of education from mere personal advancement to fostering empathy, collaboration, and a sense of shared responsibility" (p. 45).

The core insight of Ubuntu is captured in the Nguni phrase "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"—a person is a person through persons. This philosophical orientation stands in stark contrast to the individualistic, competitive ethos that characterizes much of Western-derived education. It offers a vision of education oriented toward community, relationship, and mutual flourishing rather than individual achievement alone.

Ubuntu and the Crisis of Nigerian Education

The Nigerian education system faces significant challenges exacerbated by "an overemphasis on individual achievement rather than collective development, resulting in an educational model that often fails to address the broader needs of society" (Okpara et al., 2025, p. 46). This individualistic orientation, inherited from colonial education and reinforced by contemporary global pressures, has produced graduates who may be technically competent but are often disconnected from community responsibilities and cultural values.

Ubuntu offers a corrective. By embedding Ubuntu principles into curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and educational policies, Nigeria could develop "a reimagined education system that not only addresses individual learner needs but also responds to the demands of society" (Okpara et al., 2025, p. 47). Such an approach aims to "bridge cultural divides, reduce social inequalities, and nurture a sense of unity and equity in Nigeria's diverse society" (p. 48). Ogunyemi and Ajayi (2025) further argue that Ubuntu pedagogy can transform teacher education by orienting prospective teachers toward community engagement, relational ethics, and culturally responsive practice.

Ubuntu in Practice: Principles for Educational Transformation

Translating Ubuntu philosophy into educational practice requires attention to several key principles:

Interconnectedness: Education should help learners understand their relationships with others, with community, and with the natural world. This means moving beyond individual achievement metrics to include assessment of collaborative skills, community engagement, and social responsibility.

Shared humanity: The curriculum should emphasize our common humanity across differences of ethnicity, religion, and region. This is particularly crucial in Nigeria's diverse society, where education has sometimes reinforced rather than bridged divisions.

Collective well-being: Educational success should be measured not only by individual outcomes but by contributions to community development and social progress. This requires rethinking how we define and assess educational quality.

Dialogue and participation: Ubuntu education is dialogic rather than transmissive. It engages learners as active participants in their own learning and in community life.

Cultural grounding: Ubuntu education is deeply rooted in local cultural contexts while also engaging with global knowledge. It values indigenous languages, knowledge systems, and cultural practices.

CULTURAL LAG: THE ACHILLES' HEEL OF NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Understanding Cultural Lag Theory

Cultural lag, a concept developed by sociologist William Ogburn, refers to the degree to which certain aspects of culture lag behind changes in other related aspects. In other words, the vast difference between material and non-material culture is known as social or cultural lag (Umeogu, 2025). All parts of modern culture do not change at the same rate, and since there is correlation or interdependence of parts, a rapid change in one part requires readjustment through other changes in various correlated parts.

A cultural lag occurs "when the different aspects of the society fail to adjust themselves to changes effected in some of its parts" (Umeogu, 2025, p. 4). Changes in ideas, beliefs, and value systems, for example, will be slower than changes in material conditions.

Cultural Lag in the Nigerian Context

Faleye (2013) applies cultural lag theory directly to Nigerian education, arguing that "Western education was functional in the colonial era, but dysfunctional in the post-colonial period due to cultural-lag in the society" (p. 18). This insight is crucial. What was appropriate for producing clerks and interpreters for colonial administration is not appropriate for developing citizens capable of driving authentic national development.

In contemporary Nigeria, cultural lag manifests in multiple ways. Technology changes rapidly—smartphones, social media, artificial intelligence—but educational values, beliefs, and practices change slowly, if at all. The economic system is changing fast; the industrial economy is replacing the rural economy. Much work is being done by machines. But religious

and social structures are not keeping pace with changes in the economic structure. The result is profound dislocation and dysfunction.

Umeogu (2025) offers a broader critique, arguing that cultural lag is "the deep-rooted flaw undermining the coherence and sustainability of contemporary society" (p. 2). Drawing upon African wisdom traditions alongside global scholarly thought, he identifies "the ethical chasm between innovation and introspection, productivity and purpose" (p. 6). This chasm is nowhere more evident than in education, where technological advances race ahead while ethical frameworks and cultural values struggle to catch up.

Education as the Remedy for Cultural Lag

Education is the only means to bridge cultural lag (Amaele, 2003). It is education that brings the needed and desirable changes in cultural values and ideals for the progress of society. Education helps to determine what needs to be transmitted in the light of the present and future needs of society.

But this requires a particular kind of education—not the transmission of received knowledge, but education that develops critical consciousness, ethical reasoning, and cultural awareness. Umeogu (2025) calls for "a revitalization of the humanities as a sacred compass, the ethical rehabilitation of institutions, and the reimagination of education as a cultural cure" (p. 12). The goal is "to prophetically chart a holistic path forward that harmonizes science, spirit, and society" (p. 13).

CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Understanding the characteristics of culture is essential for developing culturally grounded education.

Acquired Traits

Culture is the total of acquired traits. A newborn baby acquires traits in the process of growing up. As the baby grows older, they acquire different ideals, attitudes, and values by imitation and social contact. These experiences contribute to the formation of their personal culture. Hence, it is an important job of parents to teach the best. Things a child learns at home get printed in their mind forever. Home is considered the first school (Amaele, 2003).

The educational implication is profound: formal schooling must build upon and extend the cultural foundation laid in the home, not ignore or contradict it. When school culture differs radically from home culture, children experience dislocation and alienation.

Distinct Entity

Different societies of the world have different cultural patterns, establishing the different identities of different nations. Nigeria is known worldwide as multi-religious and multi-cultural, with its values and principles reflecting this diversity.

Education must respect and reflect this cultural distinctiveness while also building a shared national identity. This balance—unity in diversity—is one of the most challenging tasks facing Nigerian education.

Transmission

Cultural traits and patterns are transmitted from generation to generation. Each generation is free to modify the cultural heritage and transmit it to the next generation. Cultural patterns are powerfully conditioned and influenced by trends which appear from time to time according to different circumstances and conditions. Transmission is a continuous process (Amaele, 2003).

Education is the primary mechanism for this transmission. But education can transmit either uncritically (reproducing existing patterns, including their problems) or critically (preserving what is valuable while transforming what is dysfunctional).

Utility

A culture is good if it has utility to the individual and to society. If it does not fulfil this purpose, then it decays and dies out in the long run. Cultural fanaticism promotes conflicts and chaos. Therefore, one should see and adopt the cultural beauties and excellences of all cultures that exist in the world (Amaele, 2003).

This principle is crucial for Nigerian education. A curriculum that fails to serve individual and societal needs will ultimately be rejected. The current crisis of youth disillusionment and brain drain suggests that Nigerian education, in its current form, lacks cultural utility for many.

Dynamism

Culture is not static but dynamic. We live in an open system, not in an isolated system. An isolated system has no exchange. Any system with no exchange and change leads to its end. Culture changes and grows with the changing times. Due to the rapid rise in transport and means of communication, one culture adopts another culture and becomes a composite culture (Amaele, 2003).

Nigerian culture has travelled a long way and changed from previous times in numerous ways. Thinking patterns, values, beliefs, behavior ideals—all have changed. The different cultures of the world are interacting, and syntheses of culture are taking place. Education must prepare students to navigate this cultural dynamism—to be rooted in their own cultural heritage while engaging with global cultural flows.

KINDS OF CULTURE AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL RELEVANCE

According to subject matter, there are different kinds of culture, each with educational implications.

Individual Culture

Everyone has personal traits and qualities which guide their habits, thinking, and behavior. These personal likes, dislikes, interests, modes of thinking, and patterns of social behavior constitute their personal culture (Amaele, 2003).

Education must attend to individual culture—the unique constellation of traits each learner brings. This is the insight of learner-centred pedagogy, but it must be understood culturally, not merely psychologically.

Communal Culture

Different communities have their different customs, traditions, beliefs, and styles of living—known as community culture.

Nigeria's communal diversity is extraordinary. Education must respect this diversity while building bridges between communities. This is particularly challenging given the history of inter-communal conflict and competition.

National Culture

Each nation has distinct patterns of ideals, values, modes of thought, and behaviour. Such national traits are known as national culture.

Building a Nigerian national culture—a sense of shared identity and belonging across ethnic and religious divisions—is one of education's most important tasks. Yet the curriculum has often failed to develop this effectively, focusing instead on abstract political education disconnected from lived experience.

World Culture

With the rise in means of transport and communication, the whole world has shrunk into a small unit. The whole world is now supposed to have common values of life such as cooperation, empathy, sympathy, social services, social awakening, and social sensitiveness—termed world culture (Amaele, 2003).

Globalisation makes world culture increasingly relevant. Nigerian education must prepare students for global citizenship while maintaining cultural rootedness.

The key insight is that "individuals make a country, so if we talk about real change, it should start with everyone. Any change at the level of everyone over a period of time leads to communal nationality and finally a world change, further causing change in culture at the level of world" (Amaele, 2003, p. 112).

MATERIAL AND NON-MATERIAL CULTURE

Material Culture

Material culture includes all those man-made things and objects which human society has created for its physical welfare—for example, clothes, utensils, televisions, radios, and various machines (Amaele, 2003).

A critical perspective is essential here. Material things and inventions are for providing us with comfort, but we need not depend on them so much that we become their slaves. We should not forget that our minds created them, but they did not create us. We should never be slaves of science. We are their creators.

Education must help students maintain this critical perspective—to use technology without being used by it, to benefit from material progress without losing spiritual and cultural grounding.

Non-Material Culture

Non-material culture includes those ideals, attitudes, and values which modify the behaviour of an individual. Language, literature, art, music, religion, customs, traditions, etc., are some of the examples of non-material culture (Amaele, 2003).

Everyone is different from others based upon some innate qualities. There should not be a time when we keep ourselves away from understanding self. Our attitude, positive nature, hard work, values, ethics, and principles make us human. Non-material culture plays a very important role. It designs and gives a personality to a human. These make us real humans.

Whatever change in culture is happening now in our country or world or will happen in the future, our connectivity with the earth in terms of humanity, values, and ethics should never change or vanish. "The more we relate to our earth, or the down-to-earth behaviour determines our actual nature. It's not about what language we speak or what we wear or eat; it's about how you behave and take yourself as an important part of culture" (Amaele, 2003, p. 115).

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

The school must give up its ivory tower isolation. It must be closely linked with society. "The starting point of educational reform must be the re-linking of the school to life and restoring the intimate relationship between them which has broken down with the development of the formal tradition of education" (Secondary Education Commission, as cited in Amaele, 2003, p. 118).

The school should be a laboratory where the systems are tested in real terms to make a good present and design a better future. The school must make itself responsible for equipping its students adequately with civic as well as vocational efficiency to play their part worthily and competently in the improvement of national life. They should no longer emerge as helpless, shiftless individuals who do not know what to do with themselves.

A school is a social institution which has been established by society for the purpose of transmitting among its members those ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions that will make them worthy members of society. Schools are to be the reflection of the larger society outside its walls in which life can be learnt by living (Amaele, 2003).

The school is to be looked at not as a place where traditional knowledge is inculcated as authoritative, but as a place where experiments in life are carried on and where other

experiments in life are read about and talked about because of their results, by which alone they are to be judged and not by their prestige.

IMPACT OF CULTURE ON EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The aims and ideals of educational institutions are influenced by the values and patterns of society. The curriculum and methods of teaching all depend upon society and its needs (Amaele, 2003).

Curriculum

The curriculum is prepared according to the culture of society and environment. The system of education tries to realize the cultural needs of society through curriculum, which conditions all educational activities and programmes. There is a vast explosion of knowledge, and so the curriculum keeps upgrading to cater to the needs of society.

In Nigeria, however, the curriculum often reflects foreign rather than local cultural realities. This disconnect is at the heart of the crisis. Adeyemi and Ogunsanya (2024) argue that meaningful curriculum reform must begin with the systematic documentation and integration of indigenous knowledge systems across all subject areas.

Methods of Teaching

Culture and methods of teaching are intimately connected. The changing cultural patterns of a society exert influence upon the methods of teaching. Previously, teaching was teacher-centred, where the teacher used to give knowledge to the child. Now it has become student-centred. The teacher considers the needs, interests, aptitude, attitude, inclinations, and behaviour before teaching.

Cultural and social conditions generate the methods and techniques of teaching. Different ways of teaching to make teaching more realistic are the new trend. But in Nigeria, teaching methods often remain transmission-oriented, reflecting colonial pedagogies rather than culturally grounded approaches. Okonkwo and Eze (2024) found that culturally relevant teaching methods significantly improve learning outcomes in Nigerian primary schools, suggesting that pedagogical reform is both necessary and effective.

Discipline

Cultural values influence the concept of discipline. The present cultural patterns of thinking and living are directly linked to our concept of discipline where democratic values are accepted all over the world.

Nigerian schools struggle with discipline, often oscillating between authoritarian control and complete breakdown. This reflects broader cultural contradictions about authority, respect, and social order.

Textbooks

Curriculum is contained in textbooks. Textbooks are written according to the formulated or determined curriculum. Only those textbooks are welcomed which foster and promote cultural values and ideals.

Nigerian textbooks often reflect foreign perspectives, with examples and illustrations drawn from Western rather than Nigerian contexts. This reinforces cultural alienation.

Teacher

Each teacher is imbued with the cultural values and ideals of the society of which they happen to be an integral member. Only such a teacher achieves their mission successfully. They infuse higher ideals and moral values in children.

Teachers who are themselves products of a culturally disconnected system may perpetuate rather than challenge that disconnect. Teacher education must address this directly. Ogunyemi and Ajayi (2025) argue for a fundamental reorientation of teacher preparation toward Ubuntu pedagogy and cultural responsiveness.

School

A school is a miniature of society. The total activities and programmes of a school are organized according to the cultural ideals and values of the society which establishes and organizes the school. Hence, school is the centre of promoting, moulding, reforming, and developing the cultural pattern of society.

EMERGING PHILOSOPHIES AND CONTEMPORARY INNOVATIONS

Eclecticism in Nigerian Educational Philosophy

Omoriegbe and Ojo (2024) argue that "there are principles from pragmatism, existentialism, humanism, and radicalism that have relevance for educational practices in Nigeria, notwithstanding the ongoing debate in educational discussions over whether Nigerian education is based on any philosophy" (p. 86). Traces of these philosophies can be read in educational thoughts, trends, and practices in Nigeria.

The fact that Nigeria has for years engaged in varied educational activities presupposes that if there is not a single philosophy, then there are many philosophies guiding the country's educational practices. From the colonial era to contemporary society, educational practices have changed because of the educational objectives that were set in response to the changing society.

This eclecticism—drawing on multiple philosophical traditions—may be a strength rather than a weakness. The challenge is to integrate these diverse influences coherently, with Nigerian cultural realities as the organizing principle.

Afrocentric Digital Innovation

Recent innovations demonstrate the possibilities for culturally grounded educational technology. Modupe Adeyinka-Oni's launch of EduLab 360, an Afrocentric digital learning platform, represents a significant intervention. The platform integrates "phonics-based

learning with indigenous storytelling, localized content, and culturally relevant imagery to create engaging, relatable instruction" (Onyegbula, 2025, para. 4).

The project is based on years of community-based research in low-income and displaced communities including Makoko, Ajegunle, the Kuchingoro Internally Displaced Persons camp, and other underserved areas. It addresses a fundamental problem identified in the research: "We found that memorization was the default method of instruction. Once children reached their limit, they simply dropped out" (Onyegbula, 2025, para. 6).

EduLab 360 uses Finnish pedagogy principles but redesigned for the African context. It addresses the disconnect between learning and life experience that plagues much of Nigerian education. The platform's open-access structure and multilingual potential have been hailed as "a timely tool for democratizing education and reducing youth disenfranchisement, especially in rural and marginalized communities" (Onyegbula, 2025, para. 10).

Significantly, the project has gained immediate traction with policymakers. Lucy Surhyel Newman pledged to initiate a partnership to train teachers and learners virtually in Borno State, while Taraba State's Commissioner for Education indicated her team would evaluate the platform for broader deployment. The planned expansion into multiple local languages addresses the crucial issue of linguistic diversity (Onyegbula, 2025).

Traditional Leadership and Educational Transformation

The World Bank's AGILE programme demonstrates the power of culturally grounded approaches to educational transformation, particularly in northern Nigeria. Traditional leaders, "once seen as custodians of cultural norms that limited girls' education, are now champions of progress" (World Bank, 2025, para. 1).

Alhaji Ibrahim Abdulkadir, Emir of Gaya in Kano State, affirms: "I am doing my best to ensure that our communities understand the benefits of girls' education, so that more of our girls enroll and complete secondary school" (World Bank, 2025, para. 4). These leaders are challenging centuries-old traditions and reshaping attitudes toward education.

Tijani Dawanu, a traditional leader from the Kwa community in Kano State, recounts: "We held meetings with parents, encouraging them to send their daughters to school. Many parents listened, and as a result, their daughters are now enrolled" (World Bank, 2025, para. 6).

Beyond advocacy, traditional leaders are instrumental in improving school facilities. In Katsina State, Emir Alhaji Haruna takes a hands-on approach: "Every Tuesday, I personally inspect the renovation of classroom blocks and the installation of WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) facilities to ensure everything is done properly" (World Bank, 2025, para. 8).

The results are impressive. In just two years, AGILE has facilitated the renovation of over 8,400 classrooms and the construction of more than 6,000 new ones across six states. Approximately two million girls have enrolled in school (World Bank, 2025).

ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL BARRIERS: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

The Dynamics of Social Stratification

Social stratification dynamics create structural barriers to education for peaceful co-existence in Nigerian society. Despite Nigeria's oil wealth, "the concentration of resources and power among the upper strata of society relegates those outside the strata to the lowest levels of the stratification system, while keeping those already at the lowest strata from rising" (Social Stratification Dynamics, 2025, p. 3).

Corruption emerges as a key factor in these dynamics, inflating governance costs and leading to mismanagement of public resources. The gap between policy and implementation—budgets allocated but resources not delivered—reflects these structural dynamics.

Educational Implications

The consequences for education are profound. As Durueke (2026) observes, despite governmental budget allocations, the reality on the ground is dire. Media investigations consistently document pupils in states like Niger, Adamawa, and Sokoto learning under trees or in roofless, furniture-less classrooms, despite budgetary provisions (para. 22).

A teacher in Kaduna explains the implementation gap: "The budget is a ghost. We hear the numbers, but we see no books, no repairs. We teach about a digital world in a classroom without electricity" (Durueke, 2026, para. 23). This failure fuels a brutal divide between private and public education, with quality schooling increasingly out of reach for ordinary families.

Pathways to Equity

Addressing these structural barriers requires multiple interventions: mandatory free education, scholarships for disadvantaged students, stepped-up anti-corruption efforts, and improved infrastructure in underprovided communities (Social Stratification Dynamics, 2025, p. 12). But these technical solutions must be embedded in a broader cultural transformation that values education for all, regardless of social background.

TOWARD A FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURALLY GROUNDED NIGERIAN EDUCATION

Foundational Principles

Drawing on the analysis above, a framework for culturally grounded Nigerian education should be organized around several foundational principles:

Cultural rootedness: Education must be deeply rooted in Nigerian cultural realities, including indigenous languages, knowledge systems, and values, while engaging critically with global knowledge.

Ubuntu orientation: Education should emphasize interconnectedness, shared humanity, and collective well-being, moving beyond individual achievement as the sole measure of success.

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Dynamic adaptation: Education must address cultural lag by preparing students to navigate rapid change while maintaining ethical and cultural grounding.

Community engagement: Schools should be laboratories for community life, closely linked with families, communities, and traditional institutions.

Holistic development: Education should address all dimensions of human development—physical, intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual—balancing material and non-material culture.

Equity and inclusion: Education must actively address structural barriers to access and quality, ensuring that cultural grounding serves all Nigerians, not only the privileged.

Practical Strategies

Translating these principles into practice requires multiple strategies:

Curriculum reform: Develop curricula that integrate indigenous knowledge, local languages, and Nigerian cultural content across all subjects. This requires research into indigenous knowledge systems, collaboration with cultural practitioners, and ongoing curriculum review (Adeyemi & Ogunsanya, 2024).

Teacher preparation: Transform teacher education to prepare educators for culturally grounded pedagogy. This includes understanding Nigerian cultural diversity, skills in mother tongue instruction, and capacity to develop locally relevant materials (Ogunyemi & Ajayi, 2025).

Language policy implementation: Fully implement the National Language Policy (Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria, 2023), with sustained investment in orthographic development, materials production, and teacher training for mother tongue instruction.

Technology integration: Leverage Afrocentric digital platforms like EduLab 360 to deliver culturally relevant learning at scale. Invest in infrastructure while ensuring that technology serves cultural rather than commercial purposes.

Community partnerships: Develop systematic partnerships between schools and communities, involving parents, traditional leaders, and cultural practitioners in education.

Humanities revitalization: Strengthen humanities education as a "sacred compass" for navigating the ethical challenges of rapid change, as Umeogu (2025) advocates.

Addressing Specific Challenges

Girls' education in northern Nigeria: Build on the AGILE model, engaging traditional leaders as advocates and partners. Address cultural barriers through community dialogue and demonstrate the benefits of educated women.

Out-of-school children: Develop flexible, culturally responsive approaches that meet children where they are, as EduLab 360 does, allowing gradual re-engagement with formal education.

Skills mismatch: Align curricula with both global economic demands and local development needs. Integrate vocational and technical education with cultural grounding.

Brain drain: Address the root causes of emigration by creating meaningful opportunities within Nigeria. This requires not only educational reform but broader economic and political transformation.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between education and culture is fundamental yet profoundly problematic in the Nigerian context. Education is both a product of culture and a primary mechanism for cultural transmission and renewal. Yet Nigerian education, largely inherited from colonial models and perpetuated without fundamental re-examination, operates in profound tension with the cultural realities of the society it purports to serve.

This cultural disconnect manifests in multiple crises: the highest number of out-of-school children globally; a curriculum increasingly misaligned with modern needs; graduates whose skills do not match labour market demands; accelerating brain drain; and deepening youth disillusionment. These are not merely technical problems amenable to administrative fixes but symptoms of a deeper philosophical crisis.

Addressing this crisis requires not merely policy changes but a fundamental reimagining of how education relates to culture. Ubuntu philosophy offers a transformative framework emphasizing interconnectedness, communal responsibility, and collective well-being. Cultural lag theory illuminates the ethical chasm between rapid technological change and sluggish cultural adaptation. Emerging innovations like EduLab 360 demonstrate the possibilities for culturally grounded educational technology. The AGILE programme shows how engaging traditional leaders can transform educational access in culturally sensitive ways.

The path forward requires a framework for culturally grounded education that integrates these insights—drawing on indigenous philosophical traditions while engaging critically with global knowledge, addressing structural barriers while respecting cultural diversity, preparing students for global citizenship while maintaining cultural rootedness. Such an approach offers the possibility of education that is simultaneously globally engaged and deeply rooted in Nigerian cultural realities.

As Amaele (2003) argues, the school is not an image of society where the virtues and vices of society are reflected. It should serve as a laboratory for testing the traditions, values, beliefs, and attitudes prevailing in a particular society and taking upon itself the task of making society a better one. This vision—of school as laboratory for cultural renewal rather than mere transmission—offers a way forward for Nigerian education.

The stakes could not be higher. A generation this large, educated yet alienated, is a potent and unstable force. Without urgent, radical intervention, the outcomes are predictably dire: intensified brain drain crippling national development, a surge in crime and insecurity, and the solidification of a national culture that rejects knowledge and valorises graft (Durueke,

2026). The philosophy being incubated in Nigeria's broken schoolrooms today—one of despair, exit, or exploitation—threatens to become the governing philosophy of tomorrow.

The choice is clear: rebuild education on culturally grounded foundations or face the consequences of a generation that has learned, all too well, the brutal lessons the system has taught them. The fate of Africa's most populous nation depends on which lesson it finally chooses to teach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are offered for policymakers, educators, researchers, and all stakeholders committed to educational transformation in Nigeria.

For curriculum development: The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council should undertake a comprehensive philosophical review of the national curriculum to assess and address cultural relevance. This review should engage scholars of African philosophy, indigenous knowledge systems, and cultural studies, resulting in concrete recommendations for integrating Nigerian cultural content across all subjects and grade levels (Adeyemi & Ogunsanya, 2024).

For language policy: The Federal Ministry of Education should develop and fully implement the National Language Policy (Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria, 2023), with sustained investment in orthographic development for all Nigerian languages, production of culturally relevant instructional materials, comprehensive teacher training for mother tongue instruction, and public education campaigns on the importance of linguistic diversity.

For teacher education: Teacher education institutions should radically reform their programmes to prepare teachers for culturally grounded pedagogy. This includes incorporating African philosophy and indigenous knowledge into teacher education curricula, training teachers in mother tongue instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy, developing teachers' capacity to create locally relevant materials, and fostering understanding of Nigeria's cultural diversity (Ogunyemi & Ajayi, 2025).

For state governments: State governments should develop context-specific strategies for culturally grounded education, including partnerships with traditional leaders as educational advocates, integration of local cultural content into school curricula, support for community-based educational initiatives, and infrastructure development that respects cultural contexts.

For research: The National Universities Commission should establish a research and documentation centre for indigenous knowledge systems, with a mandate to identify, document, and support the integration of indigenous knowledge into higher education curricula. This centre should collaborate with communities, traditional institutions, and scholars across disciplines.

For educational technology: Educational technology developers should prioritize Afrocentric content and culturally relevant design, following the model of EduLab 360 (Onyegbula, 2025).

Platforms should integrate indigenous storytelling, localized content, and culturally relevant imagery, with expansion into multiple Nigerian languages.

For development partners: Development partners should scale up programmes like AGILE that engage traditional leaders as educational advocates (World Bank, 2025). These programmes should be studied and adapted for implementation across all regions, with attention to the specific cultural contexts of different communities.

For schools: Schools should develop systematic partnerships with communities, establishing school-based cultural committees involving parents, traditional leaders, and cultural practitioners. These committees should advise on curriculum implementation, support cultural activities, and help bridge school-community divides.

For civil society: Civil society organizations should engage in public education about the importance of culturally grounded education, building awareness of the issues, mobilizing support for reform, and celebrating innovations that demonstrate successful integration of education and culture.

For further research: Further research should be conducted on indigenous educational philosophies across Nigeria's diverse communities; the implementation of culturally grounded curricula; the relationship between cultural relevance and learning outcomes (Okonkwo & Eze, 2024); effective strategies for mother tongue instruction; the role of traditional institutions in educational development; and the impact of cultural disconnect on youth attitudes and behaviors.

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