



“CRISIS OF MEANING” IN CONTEMPORARY ACADEMIC CULTURE IN NIGERIA: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The term ‘crisis’ is often narrowly understood as a negative and somewhat threatening phenomenon. It connotes an accidental and possibly unwanted variable that could be disruptive of the status quo. But there may be more than meets the eye. Can there be something positive about crisis? Employing the philosophical method of analysis and phenomenology, the present work does a critical analysis of the concept of “crisis of meaning” as it relates to the contemporary academic culture in Nigeria. The focus is on the public tertiary institutions. The aim is to determine how sustainable the concept is. Prima facie, the crisis of meaning in contemporary academic culture may be negatively perceived as disruptive interference and deviation from the core mandate of the educational institutions. Conversely, on a closer examination, it is discovered that crises, if properly resolved, can ultimately engender positive development. Crisis of meaning in academic culture usually springs from exigencies in our institutions which include the demands for change and improvement on the status quo. Similarly the concept of meaning is not iron-cast. It is rather situated and contextual. The search for meaning is a continuous process. This is an inevitable aspect of the human condition. On this note, the work argues that the crisis of meaning in the contemporary Nigerian academic culture should not be understood solely in an absolutely negative and static manner rather as a balanced, relative and dynamic process that can yield positive creative transformation. This is a more comprehensive and sustainable conceptualization that can make for better appreciation of the challenges bedeviling our academic institutions. The paper submits.

Key words: *crisis of meaning, academic culture, disruptive, goals, creative and transformative.*

Introduction

The contemporary age has been described as “a perpetual *Age of Crisis*” (João J. Vila-Chã 2017). The concept of crisis as widely used or applied to several fields of human endeavours connotes a critical or severe situation that calls for urgent attention or response: environmental crisis, socio-political crisis, educational crisis, economic crisis etc. It is apparent that Nigerian tertiary institutions are bedeviled by a lot of challenges such as anti-intellectualism, unionism and truncated academic calendars caused by incessant strikes, inadequate funding, unprecedented digital transformation which unavoidably compels both lecturers and student to embrace modern information communication technology (ICT), nay from analogue to digital operations. Prima facie, these preponderant challenges may seem to be intrusive and disruptive phenomena in the Nigerian educational system. Being part of the key drivers of the crisis in our tertiary education, they are generally regarded as unsettling.

On a closer examination, a critical mind is impelled to ask: is the above predicament bedeviling our academic institution really and absolutely as bad as it appears? Understandably these critical and



challenging situations cumulatively threaten the goals of the educational system and give rise to the crisis of meaning that presently bedevils the system. But there is need to pause and think about the ‘crisis’ and the ‘meaning’ so generated. Randolph Starn (1971) once averred that, many historians and indeed scholars have vague and varied understanding of what crisis really means and on a closer examination, the simple impact of the word dissipates into ambiguity. Can some crises yield something positive? This is the concern of the present work which sets out to evaluate the concept of crisis of meaning as it relates to the contemporary Nigerian academic culture. The aim is to determine how sustainable the concept is.

Can something positive come from crisis? What is the criterion for measuring the authenticity of meaning in academic culture? Can this criterion apply to academic culture everywhere and every time? Is meaning in academic culture an absolute construct that defies change or is it a relative and malleable phenomenon? Is the crisis of meaning in the contemporary Nigerian academic culture to be perceived as entirely negative phenomenon or positive development? These are the concerns of the present work.

The work employs the philosophical tools of analysis and phenomenology. Analysis parses complex concepts and ideas into smaller components so as to showcase their meanings. Phenomenology tries to analyze our views of reality as shaped by our experiences and perceptions.

The work is broadly subdivided into seven brief sections. The first section is the introduction. The second section is a discourse on the concept of crisis of meaning. The third section takes the discourse deeper and dwells on the metaphysics of crisis. It further examines the inherent advantage in crisis as opportunity for growth and perfection. The fourth section outlines the *raison d'être* of tertiary education in Nigeria. It leans heavily on the *National Policy on Education* (2004). The fifth section is a phenomenological presentation of some of the key drivers of crisis in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. The sixth section makes a case for sustainable conceptualization of the crisis of meaning in contemporary academic culture in Nigeria. The final section is a critical evaluation and conclusion.

What is Crisis of Meaning?

The term ‘crisis’ evokes a wide range of intense and uncanny feelings of danger, abnormality, disruption, and urgency that calls for immediate action. This can be a threatening challenge to a status quo which can upturn a given reality or situation for better or for worse. It creates a sense of tension and confusion as evidenced in some of its polysemic applications such as in crisis of faith (which concerns believe and worship), crisis of identity (which goes with lack of sense of whom one is or reason of being), crisis of meaning (loss of direction or sense of purpose or coherence), etc. A brief flashback to the classical era and the early modern period throws more light to the history of the concept.

In the classical Greek period, the concept of crisis was primarily applied to diseases and in politics as evidenced in the writings of Hippocrates and Thucydides. The etymology illuminates the concept all the more. The word ‘crisis’ comes from the Greek word ‘κρίσις’ meaning ‘to separate’, ‘to judge’, to decide’, ‘a ‘critical point’ or ‘critical phase’ (Manolis Dafermos 2022). It later, in medical arena, gradually came to assume the meaning of “turning point” for better or worse in an acute disease. The Hippocratic treatise ‘On Affections’, maintains that crisis ‘occurs in diseases whenever the diseases increase in intensity or go away or change into another disease or end altogether’ (Randolph Starn 1971). According to the medical meaning of the word, during a crisis, the patient is on the verge of life and death. Thucydides employed the concept of the crisis for the explanation of political and military conflicts. He offered an account of the Peloponnesian War and the decline of Athens in terms of tragedy. The crisis here refers also to the climax of the plot, the turning point of a drama because of a conflict and dramatic struggle between opposing forces (Starn 1971). In his



Politics Aristotle (1932, 1275a20) used the word ‘crisis’ in the sense of decision and conflict. Here the political resolution called for some kind of authoritative backing.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the concept of ‘crisis’ took the meaning of a difficult decisive moment in the discussion about politics and related fields. In his popular book *Emile*, Rousseau wrote, ‘we are approaching a state of crisis and the age of revolutions’ (Rousseau 1979, 194). The term ‘crisis’ was a key concept in the political economy of the nineteenth century as evidenced in the works of John Stuart Mill (1885) and Karl Marx (2010 (Electronic edition)). Karl Marx in his critique of capitalism had portrayed crisis as an inevitable and intrinsic aspect of economic development. Prior to Marx, Hegel in his dialectic had opined that development can occur only through the process of conflict and opposition’ (Lawhead 2022), whereby thesis is confronted with antithesis to generate synthesis. This points to the fact that crisis or conflict can potentially generate positive reality; thus leading to development.

The generative dimension of crisis seems to hold more prospect as far as our discourse on crisis is concerned. Meanwhile, the Greek word ‘κρίσις’ (*krisis*) mentioned above shares the same root with (*krinein*) meaning “critic,” “critique,” and “criticism.” Criticism are done to highlight strengths and weaknesses or areas of deficiencies and possibly improve on them. Manolis Dafermos (2022) affirms that “crises bring to light uncomfortable truths, reveal hidden conflicts and open new unpredictable paths. This equally points to the fact that crisis has the potentiality of improving upon what is already there. Accordingly it can be said that, “crises are not only disruptive but also potentially generative or creative – they make room for new judgments, choices, possibilities. Not only this, crises seem to be intrinsic to the human condition (Costica Bradatan & Camil Ungureanu 2025). The generative dimension of crisis seems to be epitomized in dialectical perspective of crisis. “From a dialectical perspective, a crisis is a critical moment of a dynamic, contradictory, developmental process” (Manolis Dafermos 2022). This will be further explored.

In his book *A Philosophy of Crisis*, Miguel de Beistegui (2024) outlines four forms of crisis: crises of deviation, crises of exception, crises of contradiction, and crises of extinction. One common feature of all of these typologies is that they fundamentally pose a challenge to the status quo — standards, values, and approach. Crisis motivates for change. On this note, Heraclitus strongly affirms that nothing is as permanent as change. Change can be either internally or externally induced. In the Nigerian situation, the anti-intellectualism from the political and other circles and undue interference in the academic freedom of the institutions are instances of externally driven sources of crisis. Crises generate change that leads to transformation. Because crisis often goes with tension that conflicts with prior existing ideals, set goals, the situation in a way becomes a battle of *vetera et novo* (the old and the new).

In the light of the above excursus on crisis, one can say that crisis of meaning can be understood to mean critical or unstable state of affairs that threatens the very well being of an entity or a system. In the life of an individual, it is characterized by distress and loss of purpose or direction in life. In the area of culture, it refers to loss of shared values, common purpose, norms and standard. Crisis of meaning in Nigerian academic culture refers to the dominant challenges that threaten the *raison d’être* of the Nigerian educational system. Indeed the goals of tertiary education and means of attaining them are well spelt out in the *National Policy on Education*. But most times things do not go as anticipated. We shall soon examine the goals or the *raison d’être* of Nigerian tertiary education. Meanwhile a brief discourse on the metaphysics and positive dimension of crisis is quite ad rem here in order to buttress the significance of crisis.

The Metaphysics of Crisis

The concept of crisis as already stated, has become part and parcel of our daily language that we care less to examine what it really is in essence. The metaphysics or ontology of a given reality refers to its reason of being or its essence (*beingness*). It is said that action follows from being - *agere sequitur esse*. Fundamentally a ‘crisis’ is disruptive of the ordinariness, routine, values and



usualness within a system, place, person or thing. A dissonance! The nature of crisis is such that it is dynamic rather than stable; inclined to becoming rather than being. It follows that crisis can best be perceived from the point of view of process metaphysics or ontology. Process of creative transformation. According to Alfred North Whitehead, the father of process philosophy, creativity is the principle or motivating force that engineers novelty (1978).

The guiding principle of process metaphysics is that existence consists in and should be best understood in terms of *processes* rather than *substances*. The traditional belief is the traditional *agere sequitur esse* (action follows from being) but process metaphysics inverts this to *esse sequitur agere* (being follows from action). This invariably affirms that change/process is the permanent mode of every reality. Heraclitus of Ephesus (b. ca. 540 B.C.) had opined that reality is composed of a manifold opposed forces that are constantly engaged in mutual rivalry, interlocked in constant strife and conflict nay permanent crisis. The crisis may at first seem latent but gradually reaches a crescendo from there it re-ignites once again. He further theorized that everything is in constant flux- *panta rhei*. Indeed crisis is an everyday reality!

A disruption in a given *status quo* or customary flow of things is often viewed as negative phenomenon but it is also transformative as far as processists are concerned. Crisis triggers transformation. A process philosopher perceives crisis, change, creativity and novelty as the order of things. Time changes and we change with time.

Crisis as Opportunity for Growth and Perfection

The phenomenon of crisis, as disruptive and anti-peace as it may appear to be, provides opportunity for growth and perfection. This is the irony of crisis. A crisis may seem to truncate the normal flow of things, nay the existing normalcy. However, with proper and effective actions, the crisis can be resolved appropriately to yield positive results. An analogy from Erik Erikson's theory of psycho-social development buttresses the significance of crisis and the fruit of healthy resolution of crisis. Fundamental to Erikson's theory is the psycho-social crisis that characterizes each of his eight stages of development. These are opposing psychological tendencies: positive (syntonic) and negative (dystonic). The crisis eventually makes or mars personality and identity. Successful resolution of crisis leads to healthy development, while unresolved crisis stands to jeopardize the future development. Prior to Erikson, Hegel's dialectics had shown through a triadic process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, that an apparent opposition or crisis can be resolved for the better. This further proves that crisis is not bad *in toto*.

The *Raison d'être* of Nigeria Tertiary Education

It is very important at this point to look at the reason of being of Nigeria tertiary education. As no body speaks from *positionless position*, this will help us to determine the degree of deviation or concordance of the contemporary experience with the goals that shape the academic culture. The goals and modality of the Nigeria tertiary education are encapsulated in the *National Policy on Education*. Though this may not be exhaustive of the essence and anticipated standard of operations, it provides a bird's eyes' view of the *raison d'être* of the Nigerian tertiary education. It is assumed that this should serve as a background of whatever academic and administrative activities done in the institutions.

Accordingly, the Section eight of the document outlines the goals of tertiary: to contribute to national development via training of relevant manpower; inculcating of proper values for the individual and the society; development of the intellectual ability which will enable individuals to understand and appreciate local and external environment; acquisition of necessary intellectual and physical skills that will enable the individual to be self-reliant and useful member of the society; promote and encourage scholarship and community service; forge and cement national unity and promote national and international interactions. These goals are to be achieved through teaching, research and development, virile staff development, etc.

The above goals of the tertiary institutions cannot be achieved without adequate funding and academic freedom. The two major sources of funding are the government and internally generated



revenues. For academic freedom, the *National Policy* invests on the institutions the traditional power and authority of self organization and administration; selection of prospective students of the institution; determination of areas of research and determination of contents of courses. These are noble ideas meant to propel our academic institutions to great height of excellence. We can now examine some random academic, social, organizational and administrative activities in our institutions which cumulatively yield the existing academic culture, so as to determine the degree to which they are in sync or deviation from the above set ideals.

Crisis of Meaning in Contemporary Academic Culture in Nigerian: A Brief Exposé on the Key Drivers of the Crisis

The present section does a phenomenological presentation of some of the critical challenges presently facing the Nigerian tertiary institutions. The focus is more on the federal and state universities. The fifth and sixth sessions of Hannah Arendt's book *Between Past and Future* dwelt on crisis in education and crisis culture respectively. Arendt had argued that the crisis in education is an off-shoot/spill-over of the crisis that bedevils the society in general. This is quite understandable given that the education sector is part and parcel of the society and is not immuned from whatever happens in the larger society. In her analysis of the crisis in education, Arendt decried the "constantly progressing decline of elementary standards throughout the entire school system and the countless unavailing efforts of the educational authorities to stem the tide" (1960, 173). The picture painted by Arendt seems to apply to Nigerian situation presently as we examine the academic culture in Nigeria.

The academic culture in Nigeria is a cultural fusion comprising of *vetera et novo* (the old and the new) elements, values, legacies, etc. While the *vetera* here refers to the autochthonous or indigenous values, the (*novo*) novel aspects refer to the non-autochthonous elements in our academic culture which comprise mainly of the colonial legacies and a blend of modern influence thanks to globalization. True to the traditional Nigerian culture, our academic environment is largely characterized by respect for authority. The rote learning bequeathed by colonial education is fast giving way to problem-solving oriented and impact-driven academic works.

One can say without fear of contradiction that the Nigerian academic culture encompasses rigorous academic activities that span through the two semesters in each session or academic year. Exams are highly competitive including the entrance exams into the universities. The academic rigour, tension and stress are often relieved by intermittent social and cultural activities. These are also important aspects of the education process. The acute infrastructure gap in most universities and frequent disruption of academic calendar notwithstanding, Nigerian students have always shown resilience. No system can be said to be a perfect system. Some critical challenges that contribute to the crisis bedeviling Nigerian educational system include:

The Culture of Anti-intellectualism and Declining Educational Standard

The over-all socio-cultural and political environment or milieu contribute so much to educational process. In a democratic setting, it is expected that not only freedom of speech but also free flow of knowledge should be the norm. Democracy ought to provide fertile ground for critical approach to issues, conscious and sincere quest for truth and knowledge. But in the case of Nigeria, religiosity, tribalism, lack of vision and narrow mindedness seem to be prevalent. Dogmatic religious ideologies and fanaticism breed the culture of anti-intellectualism. The popular slogan "education is a scam" seems to be misleading many youths who prefer to go for quick money making.

In Nigerian political arena, anti-intellectualism manifests. Cases of politicians with fraudulent certificates abound. There seems to be some form of aversion to engaging experts and intellectuals and preference for mediocres and non-experts. The fear here is that ultimately, key decisions about the educational are not made in the academic institutions rather at the seat of power of the



government. Pat Utomi (2020), a Professor of political economy and a management expert has described political parties in Nigeria as becoming anti-intellectual, where people who think are isolated. Utomi, a one time presidential aspirant, was a guest on Arise Television where he spoke on the state of the nation and noted that Nigeria cannot make any progress where the thinking of political parties in the country is that “if you think you are a problem.” He further called for change: “We must change the kind of political parties we have, find people of ideas who have a vision of the country as leadership is about knowledge, “If you look at the Nigerian political arena, knowledge is completely missing, they have no idea of where the country should be going”. Anti-intellectual environment tells negatively on the progress of the educational system.

A government that has anti-intellectual culture tends to have strong aversion towards the intellectual and academic class. Expert ideas and wealth of knowledge generated from the universities which supposed to fecundate government policies are discarded while mediocre suggestions from praise singers and sycophants are embraced. Similar to anti-intellectualism is the problem of falling academic standard. The Editorial Board of the *Guardian Newspaper* (8 December 2016), one of the leading newspapers in Nigeria decries the falling academic standard thus:

Nigeria, once home to some of the best universities in the world, missed out even on the Africa Group of the elite in the 2016 editions of Global Ranking of Universities on Employability Skills Index just released by two reputable global bodies. The omen had been bad for years, given poor funding of education, incessant strikes by university teachers, poor admission standards and loss of ethos, among many other ills.

This is the present critical condition in Nigerian. In an unfavourable anti-intellectual environment, learning and research are bound to retrogress rather than progress. But declining academic standard is merely an indication or symptom of greater maladies.

Craze for Certificates and Academic Titles

Certificate acquisition without accompanying skills and competence adversely affect national development and tells negatively on the employability of graduates. In the recent years, there has been a growing trend of misguided obsession for acquisition of academic certificates and titles among Nigerians. Studymode.com (2026) articulates it in these clear terms: “In recent years, there is this general tendency that an increasing number of Nigerians seem to pay more attention on getting various certificates from undergraduate certificates to professional certificates.” The “increasing incidence of indiscriminate conferment and misuse of Honorary Doctorate Degrees within the Nigerian University System” has recently compelled the National Universities Commission (NUC 2026) to issue a guideline for the award and use of honorary doctorate degrees in Nigeria. The same obsession extends to the title of professorship; some of which are awarded in controversial manner. An outstanding case in hand is the controversial award of professor of Cyber Security to the former Minister of Communications and Digital Economy, Isa Ibrahim Pantami which ASUU strongly rejected. Dennis Erezi in the *Guardian Newspaper* (14 February, 2022) reported:

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has rejected the promotion of Minister of Communications and Digital Economy, Isa Ibrahim Pantami as a professor of cyber security by the management of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). ASUU President Prof. Emmanuel Osodeke told journalists in Lagos that Pantami’s professorial appointment was illegal and urged schools not to address the minister as a professor.

The ugly trend of reduction of tertiary education to mere acquisition of certificates is simply a fallacy of absolute reductionism. This malady not only lowers the standard of tertiary education but also jeopardizes national development. On the other hand, the above ugly phenomenon has more to



offer us. What is the essence of churning out certificates without competence? If we may borrow the words of Hannah Arendt, it compels us to “think what we are doing” (1998). The situation calls for proper evaluation of the standard of education and the integrity of certificates awarded. According to Socrates, as documented in *Plato’s Apology*, ‘an unexamined life is not worth living’ (38a). Intermittent appraisal helps to improve and safeguard the standard.

Academic Freedom versus Undue Government Interference

The French existentialist Philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, in the opening statement of his influential 1762 political treatise *The Social Contract (Du Contrat Social)*, wrote that, “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains”. This famous line of Rousseau applies squarely to the relationship between Nigerian government and the academic institutions. The *National Policy on Education* Section 8 no 63, stipulates that, “the internal organization and administration of each institution shall be its own responsibility. The traditional areas of academic freedom for the selection of their students, appoint their staff, teach, select areas of research” (2004). In reality the above freedom proves highly illusive given that there are intermittent encroachment upon the so called freedom by the Federal Government and its agencies. Example is the New Curriculum Structure allegedly imposed by the NUC. Jimisayo Opanuga reported in the *Guardian* (30 June 2023) that ASUU rejected this imposition:

The National Universities Commission’s (NUC) Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) has been rejected by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). ASUU’s national president, Prof. Emmanuel Osodeke, in a statement, said the curriculum is a threat to the quality of university education and will erode the power of university Senates. Osodeke describes NUC control over the majority of CCMAS contents as a nightmare, noting that it is alarming that NUC had 70% influence over the CCMAS while university Senates only had 30%.

Similarly, the different universities are not entirely free to organize their admission processes as they want it. The government interferes and brings in some odd rules that truncate the process such as the obnoxious notion of ‘Educationally Less Developed States’ (ELDS), often referred to as ‘educationally disadvantaged’ which the government uses to lower cut-off marks in standardized university admissions for some people. This not only interferes with the freedom of the universities but also creates double standards. A situation of this saturates the institutions with unqualified candidates. Insistence on merit based admission process is most likely to generate crisis which if properly resolved will not only create a level playing ground for all prospective students but also instill healthy competition in the process.

Unprecedented Digital Transformation

Over the past two decades, higher education in Nigeria has been witnessing unprecedented digital transformation. This became more widespread after the COVID-19 Pandemic which in its characteristic way compelled the society to adopt digital approach to most activities. This is to say that an ugly situation as the pandemic, which was a crisis of its own nature, led to some positive development. It became apparent that traditional classroom setting and pedagogy needed to be supplemented. Digital learning, internet access, e-library, on-line lectures, google classrooms etc, soon became the new normal. Both students and staff had to gird up their loins for the new changes. Digital transformation involves integrating of digital technologies into researching, teaching, learning organizational process in the educational institutions. This is aimed at improving the overall institutional effectiveness and efficiency. Though digital transformation has helped in no small measures in improving educational process and positioning Nigerian institutions for global competitiveness, it comes but not without some challenges.

It brings about the phenomenon of digital divide which polarizes both the staff and the students into the *digitalized* and the *analogue*. Some staff seem to be swept off their feet by the new trend of digitalization as they are compelled to be computer literate in order for them to be once more



relevant in a system they have been for years. This is part of the dilemma and crisis in the contemporary academic culture.

Underfunding and Infrastructural Deficit

The two major sources of funding in Nigerian public universities are government allocations which also includes specialized interventions like TETFund, and the internally generated revenue (IGR). Despite these double sources, funding remains grossly insufficient, necessitating a push toward endowment funds and public-private partnerships. The budgetary allocation to education sector has been nothing to write home about. In the 2025 federal budget in Nigeria, the education sector was allocated approximately a total of ₦3.52 trillion, equating to 7.07% to 7.3% of the total budget. The 2026 Nigerian federal budget allocated approximately 3.52 trillion Naira to education, representing about 6.1% to 6.15%. The above allocations fall short of the recommended 26% UNESCO benchmark.

There is a yawning gap between the growing student population and the available infrastructure. This most often result to over-crowded classrooms and laboratories. There is also lack of maintenance culture leading to uncompleted and dilapidated facilities. The environment in most Nigerian universities is not quite conducive for learning.

The preference and premium on sciences, engineering, medical and technological courses over arts and humanities and social sciences partly accounts for the inequitable disbursement of funds among the different disciplines. This no doubt stems from the need to address the prevailing scientific and technological gap in Nigeria. In addition, most researches in natural sciences and medical related areas seem to be more capital intensive as to compare to those of the arts and humanities. In other words the culture of discriminatory disbursement research funding and scholarships is necessitated by the prevailing societal needs. A good number of people however perceive this as unjust.

The Phenomenon of Unionism

The Nigerian academic culture is characterized by a very strong unionism. The most outstanding of the unions is the Association of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). The ASUU phenomenon in Nigeria has remained an enigma and a big paradox. On the one hand, most of the positive and progressive strides or achievements recorded in Nigerian public tertiary institutions have been done through the ASUU struggles. The most outstanding among them is the establishment of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) which is the brain-child of ASUU and unarguably highest source of funding for tertiary institutions in Nigeria especially federal government owned institutions. On the other hand, ASUU has become the most castigated union in Nigeria today. This irony of the situation is not unconnected with incessant ASUU strikes. Government's inability to fulfill the agreements it makes with ASUU most often compel the Union to embark on strikes.

“Crisis of Meaning” in Contemporary Nigerian Academic Culture: Towards a More Sustainable Conceptualization

The conceptualization of crisis as merely destructive phenomenon is too narrow and unsustainable. Similarly, the concept of “crisis of meaning” should not be understood as cast-iron. The present study harps on widening the horizon of the conceptualization to include the creative and transformative dimensions of crisis. The nature and function of meaning in academic culture is such that revolves around the essence or the *raison d'être* of the educational system. The goals of education no doubt determines the experiences, significant activities and processes that cumulatively give rise to academic culture. It has to be understood that ‘meaning’ in life or in whatever human undertaking is not only accessory to survival or success but also essential to the existential well-being of such endeavour. Meaning in itself, in a way, tends to be malleable, contextual and mutable. This is to say that even the concept ‘meaning’ is also in search of ‘meaning’. Meaning is not a cast-iron concept. Fundamentally, “humans are meaning-making creatures” (Andrew Goatly 2022). Meaning-making springs predominantly from experience and



our interpretations of perceived realities around us. These interpretations can change from time to time. The search for meaning is therefore an ongoing quest insofar as contexts and Zeitgeist keep changing.

Accordingly, the crisis of meaning in contemporary academic culture in Nigeria is characterized by an ongoing struggles to better understand and actualize the core purposes or mandate of the educational system. As culture is dynamic so also the manifold activities in the academic institutions a conglomeration of which gives rise to the academic culture.

In a way, the crisis of meaning in contemporary academic culture in Nigeria can be understood to mean critical or challenging state of affairs that threaten the existence and ultimate achievement of the goals of the education system. If these are properly resolved, they will add to the over-all well-being and development of the educational system. This work is primarily concerned with the perception about or the conceptualization of these challenges that crystallize into crisis.

The present article, in line with the process philosophy which emphasizes change, creativity and novelty, perceives the so called crisis as not entirely negative and disruptive but as processes that lead to transformation. The fact of emergence of crisis is partly accounted for by the changing ideals and needs of the time. A Latin adage states: *Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis* (Times change and we change with them). All forms of pigeonholing go against the above spirit of change and therefore should be avoided. Take the case of unprecedented digital transformation. This necessary step becomes an adequate response to the exigencies of the time. The zeitgeist is that of transition from analogue to digital. The COVID-19 Pandemic further becomes an additional impetus. The situation was such that social distancing and lockdown could not allow for the usual physical classroom interactions thus necessitating the hybrid approach. Change became inevitable. Digitalization may pose some challenges to many staff and students but it improves efficiency in no small measure and further equips Nigerian academic institutions for global competitiveness. The same principle applies to other key drivers of crisis in the contemporary Nigerian academic culture such as anti-intellectualism which calls for training in rationality and critical thinking. The contention here is that if the challenges are properly resolved, they would ultimately add to the improvement of the educational system.

The present work therefore makes a clarion call for the widening of the horizon of the concept of crisis of meaning to incorporate not only the negative but also the positive, creative and transformative aspects. Crisis provides the impetus for transformation and self-discovery. Meaning-making is highly contextual and dynamic. Education is about acquiring the ability of critical thinking and necessary skills, understanding and analyzing contexts and managing situations as they arise. Education is a life-long process. The ideals of academic are contextual and situated. They are therefore bound to change with time. In one way or the other, crisis propels this change. Some crises may be turbulent while others are not. However they are all dynamic processes that could make or mar the system.

Meaning and ideals in the academic culture should reflect the spirit of the moment. On this note therefore there is an imperative of constant examination and paradigmatic reorientation in the area of the objectives of education so as to properly adjust to the ever evolving global competitiveness. Time changes and we ought to change with time. What might have served yesterday or today may no doubt become anachronistic tomorrow. This is in consonance with the spirit of process philosophy. The *National Policy on Education (2004)* affirms the above line of thinking by stating categorically that, "Government has stated that for the benefit of all citizens, the country's educational goals shall be clearly set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of the individual and those of the society, in consonance with the realities of our environment and the modern world." This is an existential reality of life.



Conclusion

The present article has dwelt on the concept of crisis of meaning as it relates to the contemporary Nigerian academic culture. The aim is to determine how sustainable the concept is. The article began by examining what is crisis meaning. For a deeper understanding of the concept, the article unearthed the ontology or metaphysics of crisis. It also highlighted the fact of crisis as opportunity for growth and perfection. As a background for evaluating the degree of crisis of meaning in contemporary Nigerian academic culture, the *raison d'être* of the Nigerian tertiary education was discussed leaning heavily on the *National Policy on Education*. The work unravels some of the key drivers of crisis in our contemporary academic culture. The core of the work is a discourse on the sustainability of concept of crisis of meaning. Here the work argued that the understanding of crisis as merely negative phenomenon is too narrow. Premising on a widened meaning of crisis and backed by the flexibility and tentativeness of the concept of meaning, the work argued for a more comprehensive and sustainable conceptualization of crisis of meaning. This was further justified by process philosophy and the inherent creative and transformative potential of crisis.

The present work illuminates and widens our understanding of what crisis of meaning is so as to equip us with better appreciation of the challenges in our different academic institutions. It is therefore imperative that we learn that the ideals and values of our educational system are not iron-cast. Meanings that we hold as sacrosanct are bound to change with time. To position Nigerian institutions for the ever evolving global competitiveness, we must always rethink and reform in the light of contemporary positive ideals and meanings.

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