

How “Necessary Preoccupations” Can Enhance Curriculum Development in African Universities

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Abstract

I propose in this paper that “Necessary preoccupations” can reduce the alien, oppressive and euro-centric curriculum in African universities. A manifestation of the euro-centrism is the clear denial of a proper space for African philosophy in our institutions of higher learning. It is observed that almost all African universities offer courses in British philosophy, American philosophy and European philosophy with little or no attention given to courses in African philosophy. The products of these systems eventually are clones that are groomed to imitate the European thought and life. How can this anomaly be reduced in African universities and in the continent in general? I claim that African philosophers and scholars should begin to preoccupy themselves with necessary things that affect the continent with little regards to the sentiments of the western writers. The welfare and needs of the Africans should be given priority in the formulation of curriculum in African universities. The curriculum should incorporate phenomenological and substantive issues and executed through a conversational approach.

Keywords: Curriculum, necessary preoccupation, African Universities, Africa, Euro-centrism

INTRODUCTION

Education is an indispensable tool for national development and self-realization. It is a critical tool and an instrument for achieving the overall national aims of every nation. This development includes fostering social norms and the development of social and intuitional capacities. As a result, education helps in the development of intellectual and mental capacities of every members of the community. This is why Etieyibo observes that “If education is important for the development of the intellectual mental capacities of individuals, then at least within the formal aspect of education, it is imperative to pay attention to content of what forms the education curriculum, namely, subjects, lessons and topics to be taught and learned” (Etieyibo, 2018, p.8). The above named does not exhaust the content of a good curriculum but for the sake of this essay, these ones are of essence to our focus.

Almost all nations acknowledge the potency of education as a foundation to any developmental height. To achieve this, they mapped out aims and aspirations in their national policy on education. This means that the height of any nation is dependent on the value they placed on education, its content and their planners. The celebrated leadership author John Maxwell observes with James Bryant that “public education is a great instrument of social change....education is a social process, perhaps the most important process in determining the future of our country, it should command a far larger portion of our national income than it does today” (John Maxwell, 2010).

In Africa, It is sad to note that this major pillar of development is grossly neglected. As a result, Africa cannot exercise full control to this epistemic resource and its abounding heritages. In fact it is alluded that “much of what is taken for education in Africa is in fact not African but rather a reflection of Europe in Africa” (Higgs, 2008, 458). The reason for this according to Higgs is that “the norm for educational achievement and success for African children and students is that of western European elitist culture, where the English language is socialized and the internalization of bourgeois European values is seen as the index of progress (2008, 456). As a result, the effect of the intellectual domination is still evidenced in the financial dependence of African universities to their European counterparts. It also extends to the total fidelity by African universities to the use of foreign languages, training, orientations, research results and curriculum materials (Adams, 1975. p.57). It is pertinent to note that greater percentages of the content of the curriculum in African universities are contributions of scholars from outside Africa. The uncritical assimilation of western education has instilled a wholesome European mentality within African scholars and their students.

This intellectual hegemony and intellectual dominance will continue if African universities do not rise to work hard for their intellectual independence. I believe that one of the ways that African universities can achieve their authentic intellectual independence is through a foundational and African oriented curriculum. It is despicable and worrisome also that after about two decades of independence from their colonial masters, African Universities are not matured enough to claim intellectual independence and ownership of their educational contents. They are not yet fully acquainted with African problems and challenges that should inspire a formidable curriculum that is African oriented and problem solving-driven.

The above preliminaries is to set the stage for what this essay is all about, which is an attempt to reduce the continued intellectual dominance by the west through an African inspired and welfare driven curriculum for African universities. The first major step in achieving this is to know what curriculum is all about. The second section is an attempt to expose what should constitute a good curriculum and those saddled with the responsibility of developing a good curriculum. The third section ushers us into the dynamics of curriculum development in African philosophy. Finally, this paper proffers what it terms a 'necessary preoccupation' as one of the ingredients that will enhance the development of curriculum in Africa.

CURRICULUM, CONTENT AND PLANNING

The need for rapid change and the effect of globalization in our society has made it a *sine qua non* to adjust our education system in order to be relevant in our contemporary world. However, it is regrettable that most of the resources and materials used in African schools are just an imitation of western educational models which are unsuitable to African system. It is expedient that African institutions halt mimicking wholesomely the western inspired models and look inwards to develop an original and ethno-based education models. It is foolishness when institutions whose character is majorly ethno-provincial keep masquerading as replica of Oxford and Cambridge without showing the same productivity as the original places they are mimicking.

To end this ugly trend, there is urgent need for a radical re-orientation in our ivory tower on the use of suitable materials that can fit well in our African environment. Adams was extreme on his call for this re-orientation when he opines that "An African staff working with western ideas is not Africanized. No, for a university to be truly African requires that such an African staff be paid with African funds and also should be working with African materials" (1975, p.57). Adam's prescription is simply a call for Africa's educational resources to be relevant and be in tandem with African environment but with universal appeal. It is good that before proceeding with our task in this section, to look at the meaning of a curriculum.

CURRICULUM AND ITS MEANING

The word curriculum represent in its original Latin sense, a race ground, a run way, or a course which one runs to reach a goal. In education, Rugg (1947) sees curriculum as the life and programme of the school. It is an enterprise in guided living, the stream of dynamic activities that constitute the life of young people and their elders. It is guided living in the sense that the educational activity is planned in a systematic way so that the individual child can learn survival skills for useful living in the society.

For Tyler (1963) curriculum is simply all the learning experiences of students which are planned and directed by the school to attain its educational goals. Tanner and Tanner have criticized this definition by Tyler on the ground that it failed to demonstrate how school learning experiences differ from those which are not under the auspices of the school.

The idea of Onwuka (1981) sees curriculum as a reflection of what the people feel, believe and do. He opines that a curriculum must be seen as a deliberate, systemic and planned attempt, not only to change the behavior of children and youth, but also to enable them gain social insight and build a better society.

These definition as good as it seem on the paper are not a reflection of our African ambience. Most of the curriculum in our universities are systematic but are not pro- African and most of them do not arm African students with skills to survive in our contemporary world. Our school administrators simply copy what is obtainable in western nations or America which makes our students a mole of western ideas.

Post-colonial Africa is replete with diverse challenges ranging from the effect of colonialism, slavery, neo- colonialism, poverty, illiteracy, diseases etc. there is therefore an urgent need for a curriculum that is capable of decolonizing Africa's subjugated mind and transform her citizens to emerge from an authentic African ambience. This curriculum should be capable of transforming African fading values to a more authentic African values and less of a western or *oyibo oji* as Gloria Chukwu asserts. It is on this similar tone that Chimakonam (2016) asserts "that training Philosophers in universities in Africa with the western curriculum amounts to deploying a misfit tool to a local problem".

CONTENT OF A CURRICULUM

On the content of a curriculum, it is of utmost importance that a good curriculum must incorporate the prevalent conditions, peculiarities and trends in contemporary society and figure out some workable educational aspects that will better Africa's living conditions. The contemporary curriculum should above all also address some vital social problems in Africa. It is on this premise that Warner et al. (1973) urges that "education for the future is useless unless it prepares learners to meet problems that are new and that neither they nor anyone else has ever encountered before. All professionals in education programme need an image of tomorrow to plan their curriculums" (Walter et al., in Eyibe, 2007) From Walters propositions it is interesting to deduce that a good curriculum should be futuristic in content and hence prophetic in academic dimensions. It should determine the need of the hour to determine the need of tomorrow. This is why it is a misfit to use 18th century curriculum in this 21st century. This calls for constant revalidation and an update of our educational curriculum on yearly or decade basis to maintain local relevance and content.

It is this shortage in the futuristic content of our contemporary curriculum that spurred Dedmon (2012, p.126) to lament that our system of education was shaped by the needs and structure of the old-fashioned industrial age. She observes that school subjects were chosen in a hierarchy designed to prepare citizens for jobs in an emerging industrial society. The quest for globalization requires an urgent need to discard the industrial system of education and to incorporate in the minds of African students with the tools of analysis, problem solving, constructive questioning, and a facility for teamwork and co-operation, in order to transform the present African battered educational system.

To satisfy 21st century education requirements, the content of a curriculum is expected to be elastic, flexible, and expansive as possible. According to Etieyibo:

It is elastic, flexible and expansive when it is capable of incorporating as much possible many diverse cultural norms, values and worldview. Unless of course one is a “cultural imperialist” or “western universalist” namely, subscribes to the view of some superior and dominant culture.² This idea of an elastic, flexible and expansive curriculum is what, it seems to me, discussions about the decolonization, Africanization and transformation of the curriculum is more or less about (Etieyibo, 2016, p. 9).

The above submission reveals the need for a curriculum to be open and assimilate what needs to be assimilated and jettison or reform every imperialistic or domineering values and norms. Robinson in (Dedmon, 2012, p.151) advised that such (imperialist) system does not need reformation but a revolution. Robinson however observes that the major challenge of this revolution is the courage to question what most of us have taken for granted.

What has Africans taken for granted in her educational system? Chimakonam is of the opinion that one of the things that Africa has taken for granted is the content and structure of her curriculum.

The mis-education or improper education of children can arise from poor quality teachers, a poorly structured curriculum, and incorrect deployment of the curriculum, lack of resources or through bad education policies that either did not take the future seriously or miscalculated in the education equation...central to these is the structure of the curriculum. In our context, that curriculum would be that of education (Chimakonam 2016, p.513).

Having attempted to demonstrate the importance of a curriculum, it is expedient also to x-ray the personalities saddled with the responsibility of structuring a good curriculum.

WHO SHOULD STRUCTURE A CURRICULUM?

In the light of the above, Chimakonam (2016, p.514) absolved Philosophy from this task. He pointed out that the task of philosophers is simply to create ideas while the formulation of a curriculum is simply the responsibility of the ancillary sciences. Eyibe has some reservations in leaving this task to ancillary sciences alone because for him, they lack the necessary epistemic paraphernalia in discharging this duty. In Eyibe (2000), “It is becoming increasingly evident that science and technology education studies are so important a subject to be left in the hand of scientists, technologists and engineers alone, who in spite of their hard work, lack forum and central meeting point to discuss pedagogy and compare notes on the advances they might have made in the course of their research and discoveries”. Continuing, Eyibe notes that science should as a matter of fact refrain from isolating her tasks from real world anxiety and troubles. They should no longer feel that they are only constrained in dealing with the immutable laws of Newton but they should also focus on patterns of biological growth, of politics, economics, sociology and psychology.

It is evident from above that any field that plays an exclusive role will find it extremely difficult to structure a credible curriculum. This is where philosophy as the mother of all sciences comes to mind. Philosophy is a discipline that looks towards the future with her tools of innovations, creativity, problem

solving, love of learning, constructive and original questioning, a facility for team work and co-operation. Philosophy is that discipline that can unite scholars, professionals and even laymen in curriculum planning because a good curriculum should accommodate and address the problems of the society. To achieve this mandate, the roles of scholars, parents, citizens and educators are necessary for good curriculum planning. It is at this juncture that I submit that philosophy being an arrow head of all intellectual exercises is more advantaged to make special contributors to curriculum planning.

CURRICULUM IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Over the years there has been a serious enquiry on the existence of philosophy in Africa and also the existence of African philosophy? These two enquiries may be confusing but it is needful to distinguish them for easy comprehension. Philosophy in Africa refers to Africa's participation in the universal enterprise of philosophy while African philosophy presupposes a distinct way of doing philosophy. It differs from western, Eastern, or American philosophy not in kind but in approach. (Segun 2014, p. 3)

The newness of African philosophy has elicited great debate on its existence, nature, content, scope, space and relevance. On the cheerful note, Uduigwomen (2009, p.2), observes that the controversy regarding the existence of African philosophy is long dead and buried; and for him, the debate is a matter of mere historical interest.

This newness has led to the probing of the nature and content of African philosophy, that is, the teaching, studies, writings materials and its general practice. Some allude the relative youth of African philosophy to the paucity of the above resources. According to this view, African philosophy is still anticipating their Aristotle and Descartes to provide them with the necessary systems and methods for critical reflections. The clear manifestation of this is the clear denial of proper space for African philosophy in world's institutions of higher learning and regrettably even in Africa's institutions of higher learning. It is observed that almost all African university offer courses in British philosophy, American philosophy and European philosophy with minute of them offering courses in African philosophy. Okeja justifies this claim when he observes that "African universities all have traditional western courses and just one course titled African philosophy. All levels of thought classified as African philosophy are lumped up in a single course that goes by the name African philosophy" (2012: p. 666).

There is urgent need to rise up and promote African philosophy to stand shoulder to shoulder with western, American and even eastern philosophy. Segun citing Asouzu advocates that;

The progress and stagnation of African philosophy depends largely on the attitude of Africans themselves who have the primary duty to patronize and promote it. In our institution of higher learning, a conducive atmosphere has to be created for the promotion and patronage of ideas, systems and methods of African philosophers in view of promoting African philosophy. That is to say, the thoughts of regional philosophers should be studied and made available to students and should be brought to compete with each other (Asouzu 2004, p.111).

Unfortunately, this call for patronage and promotion of African philosophy in African universities are being frustrated and scuttled even by Africans themselves. African universities still consider it absurd and not worthwhile for African Philosophy to be included in their curriculum. Moore presents this despicable picture even in South African university thus;

Again, in almost all departments of philosophy at South African Universities, African philosophy has unsurprisingly not been considered worthy of inclusion in the philosophy syllabi. The current changing political and social conditions have, however necessitated reluctant recognition of the possibility of the existence of African philosophy as a legitimate reason⁵. Despite these gains, vestiges of old Eurocentric conceptions still remain and manifest themselves in veiled or disguised denial of African philosophy (Moore 1996, p. 61).

In the footnote of his writing, Moore observes that “even black universities with the exception of University of Zululand have not considered it wise to attach African philosophy in their curriculum” (ibid). He laments that even UNISA who tried the experimentation ended up opening a separate unit for African philosophy.

In line with Moore, Njoku in Adams, also observes that “whether an African student is reading philosophy, political science, economics, or natural science, he finds it all alike by current methods of teaching: that all the significant ideas appear to have been contributed by people outside his own culture” (1975, p. 59). Furthermore, Adams categorically states that Africanization cannot be complete as long as the majority of materials and ideas studied in Africa come from outside Africa. Etieyibo lends his voice to aver that the Africanization project is imperative because of the general saying that “charity begins at home”.

If “charity begins at home,” then it seems important that the Africanization project ought to begin in philosophy departments in universities in Africa. But we may also say that part of the reason for talking about the Africanisation of the curriculum in universities in Africa is that this is motivated or dictated by pragmatic reasons. For one may think that it is to get universities in Africa to see and appreciate the need, importance, and urgency of Africanizing the philosophy curriculum than it is to get universities elsewhere....to see and appreciate the need, importance and urgency of doing so (2018, p.16).

It is this need and urgency of Africanizing philosophy curriculum that inspired Chimakonam to model a transformative and critical framework of an African focused curriculum to tackle the alien, often irrelevant and oppressive education system taught in our universities.

Chimakonam (2016) introduced three procedures for Africanizing philosophy curriculum to avoid deploying western misfit tool to our local problems. The outlined models are as follows: the narrative of balance (B model), the narrative of displacement (the D model) and narrative of competition (C model).

The narrative of balance (B model) is structured in such a way that an equal number of courses of the same unit are factored in a curriculum, where one is African and another western. The reason for this balance is to attract the gains of western thought and maximizing its advantages to the circumstances of life in Africa.

The narrative of displacement (D model) according to Chimakonam entails introducing a whole set of African philosophy curricula to substitute the already existing curricula in universities in Africa which are dominated by Western philosophy courses. The rationale behind this model is more or less to claim an intellectual territory for African philosophy.

The narrative of competition (the C model) is modeled to allow the thriving of two units in the department of Philosophy: the western and African. An assessment mechanism will be put in place to monitor the thriving of these units. Between the two units, any one that is capable and more enterprising can out do the other.

The narrative of displacement and competition has the tendency of producing a philosophy curriculum that contains mechanism for overcoming what Chimakonam (2016) describes as “logomania” which has the tendency of cloning African students to think like their European tutors. In Chimakonam’s words “in the foremost challenge with this procedure is that African children will emerge from schools not knowing how to think originally, but rather would be groomed to imitate the European forms of thought and life” (2016:520).

The narrative of balance seeks to incorporate western and African philosophy in one curriculum so as to vacillate between two valued and three valued thought models. The B-model, though attractive but might lead to what Amos Wilson calls “falsification of African consciousness.” It might starve the African child of the needed creativity and originality. Conclusively, Chimakonam chose B-model above the C model and D-model but has some reservations on the capital intensity of the Balance model and the disastrous effect it will create in the system should narrative fail to materialize.

THE NEED FOR “NECESSARY PREOCCUPATION” IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR CURRICULUM

It is on the invitation of Chimakonam to further engage on these models that I propose the engagement of what Jennifer Vest calls “Necessary Discourse” in the development of our curriculum. Vest was critical of the “perverse preoccupations” of the ethno-philosophy, Excavationists and Professional School philosophers who contend that societal development and cultural sophistication are defined in the lens of the acquisition of Western technology and Christianity. These philosophers believe that the European way of thinking is the only way worth discussing and other forms of philosophy like witches are simply not worth bothering with. As part of our decolonial project, the migration by African philosophers from “perverse preoccupation” to “necessary preoccupation” becomes expedient in order to position African philosophy from her place to her destined space.

Vest (2009, p.20) believes that African philosophers have devoted their precious time engaging in “perverse dialogues” by striving endlessly to destroy the myth of savagery perpetuated by the Colonial West which portrayed Africans as 'non-rational'. She queried the rational for these perverse engagements thus:

Why should Africans prove they are rational, thoughtful, intellectually sophisticated persons? To whom must they prove this? Why must African philosophy be defined in terms of a reaction to foreign misrepresentations? Why must we as Black people devote our greatest minds to engaging in dialogues designed to prove our humanity? (Vest 2009, p.20).

There are many challenges that should occupy African philosophers especially those things which have kept them at the back side of the world. These are the things that should bother African philosophers and not in engaging dialogues that questions their humanity. Vest (2009, p.20) believes strongly that “the project of African philosophy is best served by eschewing such engagement or at the least by being aware of the obfuscating role such dialogues has for African philosophy”.

Vest (2009) contends that concerns of African philosophers should be a necessary preoccupation which debates on African *lebenswelt* and not philosophizing to curry favor from the western audience. Debates on African ontologies should be thoroughly and rigorously done not minding how it fits into existing discourses that are authored by western writers.

If there is a widespread belief in witches in many parts of Africa, perhaps a debate on the ontology of witchcraft is necessary, regardless of how it fits into existing discourses of primitive religions authored by Western writers. If there is a widespread belief in intimate ontological relationships between humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects, then perhaps an African metaphysician should explore this idea, regardless of how it might be disparaged by European thinkers who might classify such beliefs as animistic and therefore not worthy of investigation. Perhaps the ideas of important men and women ought to be studied by Sage philosophers whether or not they can be compared to the ideas of Socrates. Perhaps African languages ought to be studied for their epistemological insights regardless of whether similar insights can be found in Anglo-American Analytic investigations of language (Vest 2009, p.20).

Vest strongly believes that efforts such as these will lead to a conscious conversation by African philosophers in their field of endeavors. It is these necessary debates that I propose that should form the bulk of the curriculum in African universities, such curriculum should also factor in Africa’s communal and social life in a substantive way. Mkabela and Luthuli (1997, p.1) had this model in mind when they submit that:

a welfare concern, where the basis of communalism is giving priority to the community and respect for the person. It also involves sharing with and helping persons. Educational discourse (curriculum) within this African frame of reference would help African people function in relation to one another in their communal tradition. Such a functioning would promote a collective effort directed ultimately at the good of the community (Mkabela and Luthuli (1997, p.1).

The necessary preoccupation is demonstrated and validated by service and community oriented curriculum which will instill discipline, creativity, ingenuity and hard work in the mind of African youths. To this end, Higgs (2008) advice is timely, “Education, then, in the indigenous African setting cannot, and indeed, should not, be separated from life itself. It is a natural process by which the child gradually acquires skill, knowledge, and attitudes appropriate to life in his or her community - an education inspired by a spirit of *ubuntu* in the service of the community”.

This necessary preoccupation which is powered by service and community oriented curriculum should also prioritize phenomenological and substantive issues affecting Africans which has retarded her progress. Phenomenological issues are those challenges that currently bedevils Africa in our contemporary times namely: poverty, election malpractices, rigging, marginalization, illiteracy, terrorism, diseases, wars, perverse traditions, gender inequality, bad governance, corruption, racism, erosion, desertification, religious intolerance, injustice, banditry, kidnapping, cybercrimes, ritualism and all manner of insecurities etc. These are some of phenomenological issues plaguing African continent but sadly they are not captured in our curriculum. Instead African universities are preoccupied by subjects that have little or nothing to further the progress of her citizens. What has the study on the commentaries Plato to do in the rescuing of the displaced communities of *Agatu* in Benue state of Nigeria who were displaced by Boko-haram?

The content of the curriculum should also be substantive in that it should focus on building the episteme of African philosophy with phenomenological raw material of thought through a rigorous and critical engagement of individual African philosophers with one another’s thought which leads to the creation of original, innovative and rigorous episteme geared toward a synthesis borne out of contestation and protestation in a complementary way using the African mode of thought (Chimakonam 2015, p. 465). This means that the content of our curriculum should be conversational in approach where rigorous and creative struggle of ideas are entertained by the proponent and opponent so that original and innovative ideas will emerge at the end of the encounter.

Conclusion

Education is one of the indispensable tools for human development and self-realization. Education helps the development of intellectual and mental capacities of the members of every community. In Africa, this indispensable tool of development is seriously neglected. This neglect ranges from: from poor quality teachers, poorly structured curriculum, and incorrect deployment of the curriculum, lack of resources or through bad education policies. Central to these is the structure of the curriculum. In African philosophy for instance there is clear denial of proper space for African philosophy in Africa's institutions of higher learning. African universities all have traditional western courses and with few courses in African philosophy. This marginalized state necessitated urgency for Africanizing philosophy curriculum to balance the oppressive education system taught in our universities. I have proposed in this essay that only a "necessary preoccupation" will enhance the development of our curriculum in African universities.

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