



## INCLUSION OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEMS AS A KEY PHILOSOPHICAL ORIENTATION IN TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL IDEOLOGY

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### **Abstract:**

In most if not all, African countries since their independences education still lacks Africanness and education discourse has focused on two related developmental issues. The need to change a Western influenced education orientation linked to undermining African intellectual capabilities and knowledge systems. On the other hand, some Afrocentric scholars have criticized the paid-labour-technocratic literacy education systems adopted by African countries from colonialism after independences as Western conservative and reaffirming schooling as a guardian of Western civilisations. This paper presented a summary of major theoretical and historical perspectives on why African philosophy currently continue to remain excluded as the most dominate philosophy of education in African education institutions in contrast to time and efforts granted Western philosophies of education. This paper argued that lack of Afrocentrism in education hinders self-actualisation, multi-culturalism, democracy, freedom of choice, academic diversity, independent thinking hence restricting sustainable education, self-driven development, but furthering African intellectual, design and technology dependency on the west. This paper concluded by calling for refurbishment and redefinition of the purpose of education and the nature of how teachers are trained since they are agents of change and disseminators of developmental goals. Contemporary African education and teacher training to target schooling as an agent of modernity, democracy, difference, diversity, cultural and socio-economic relevance was recommended. Above all recognition and inclusion of indigenous knowledge and other aspects of African philosophy were recommended too. This research took a qualitative paradigm. Using purposive sampling-data was collected from both primary and

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secondary documentary sources from libraries and the internet using the 'Analytical Model of Constant Comparison'. Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously.

**Keywords:** Western orientation or philosophy; African philosophy; Afrocentricism; Teacher training; African education systems; Western civilisations; Afrocentric functionalism

## 1. Introduction

Other philosophical traditions, such as African philosophy are rarely considered as major academic philosophies in most, if not all, African education systems. Since emphasis is mainly placed on Western philosophy, religions, languages, design and technology, economic standards as the magnum opus of all life, or as the vector of all philosophic thought. As a result, non-Western philosophical works face many marginalisation obstacles. Given the scenario, that African philosophy is generally perceived irrelevant; the central objective of this paper is to explore ideas about some of the factors behind that isolation, and also to find out how African philosophy could gain respectability and value as part and parcel of formal education orientation.

Given the challenge that education in most African schools still lacks a sense of local direction, self-identity or Africanness, yet according to most educationists like idealists, Progressivists, neo-Marxists and postmodernists, the major purpose of education is self-actualisation, literacy in one's, other people's cultures and raise consciousness about issues of marginalisation, intellectual empowerment through the focus of social conflicts and autobiographies of oppressed people oriented curriculum (Sedley, 1998; Ozmon & Craver, 1986; Woods and Barrow, 1990; Curzon, 1985). There is need to address the issue of African education systems curricula content in line with the culture of its beneficiaries (Okrah, 1998; Akinpelu, 1995; Barker, 2001; Fafunwa and Aisiku, 1982; Higgs, 2000; Moyana, 1989; Mudzamba, 1982). It becomes questionable, way after most African countries' independencies, why their formal educational content is still based on alien cultural epistemology they criticised and fought to correct. As a result, education orientation in African schools is largely anchored in a foreign epistemo-ontological system (Nkrumah, 1978; Mudimbe, 1988; Atkinson, 1972). Yet everyday life of the indigenous African child or learner is based on a different world-view. The trend of pursuing Westerncentric philosophies of education in African schools has brought much under-estimation of African intellectualism in Africa's contemporary education systems. Westerncentric education has currently been criticized by Afrocentric scholars (Gyekye, 1988; Wiredu, 1995; Chikombah, 1988, Sogolo, 1993, Biakolo, 2000, Arowolo, 2010), as irrelevant to Africa's move toward mental decolonization, self-reliance and intellectual liberation.

## 2. Methodology

To find out why African education systems today are still Westerncentric and how African education systems can include their own cultural values like African philosophy and indigenous knowledge systems, this study took the form of a qualitative research design. The paper adopted descriptive analytic model based on the 'constant comparative method' formulated by Glaser & Strauss in Lincoln and Guba, 1985. In the descriptive analytic model, the researcher gathered literature information from documentary sources (Birley and Moreland, 1998; Silverman, 2008; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Singleton and Straits, 1999). These comprised of both primary and secondary sources of published literature on the inclusion of African philosophy in contemporary African education systems. The sources of literature were selected through purposive sampling, specifically the 'maximum variation sampling' technique of Patton in Lincoln and Guba, 1985. This sampling technique enabled the researcher to target only information rich literature sources related to key issues to the research question, while at the same time ensuring that information is captured in its various ramification and subtle nuances (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Sources of literature were sourced from libraries and the internet. Data collection and analysis in this study took place simultaneously. The researcher read relevant sections of sources of literature, took down notes. The note taking process entailed identifying and summarising major ideas or themes from the sources, to draw implications of inclusion of African philosophy in contemporary African education systems.

## 3. Data Analysis and Discussion

### 3.1 History of Educational Reform in Africa

In most African countries since their independences educational discourse has focused primarily on two related issues. Education reform being linked to the importance of providing labour to different sectors of the economy-schools in this perspective are seen as training grounds for knowledge provision and occupational skills that are necessary for expanding both domestic production and foreign investment. This view also links schooling to the demands of a technocratic and specialised literacy. On the other hand, some Afrocentric scholars (Mbiti, 1990; Nkrumah, 1978; Nyerere, 1967; Peresuh and Nhundu, 1999) have criticized the education systems adopted by African countries soon after independencies as Western conservative, "*irrelevant to African socio-economic needs and civilization*". Afrocentric scholars' redefinition of the purpose of education and the nature of teachers' work has set the stage for a number of ideological assaults against Western inherited schooling. They call for the refurbishment of schooling to target modernity, democracy and diversity, cultural and ethnic tolerance and above all they call for recognition and inclusion of indigenous knowledge and other aspects of African philosophy into formal education content.

Since African independencies from 1970s educational and development experts, adopting multiple disciplinary foci, theoretical and ideological perspectives, have

debated Africa's educational needs. They have formulated divergent assessments of and prescriptions for educational systems, institutions and programs. Overshadowing this diversity of opinion a central consensual orthodoxy is the view that education, particularly formal schooling, is an essential, if not the determining, ingredient in the development process (UNESCO, 1985; Datta, 1984; Seidman and Anang, 1992; Chikombah, 1988). Equally important is what is being taught in the classrooms and inclination of what is being taught. Many researchers have spent limited time to find out what is taught inside formal classrooms and its relevance in addressing past social injustices, inequalities and misfortunes. Africans have focused on the incorrect assumption that quantitative education expansion automatically leads to socio-economic transformation development or quality education.

African countries have tried to see, as throughout the world, education as a right for all human beings and a starting point for economic and social development, even though accessibility and efficiency of educational systems are still under criticism and numeracy challenges. Seeing education as a right for all human beings and key to socio-economic development has resulted in African countries losing focus on why they fought for both political and mental independence leading to education crisis in most African countries. African countries after independence have ignored addressing education core essentials of mental empowerment-liberation from historical decimation, addressing power-knowledge politics, above all correcting or erasing all distortions against African intellectualism. In other words the relevance of contemporary education systems in Africa should be twofold-to address and correct historical misconceptions about African people, history, philosophy, culture and civilisation, and also meet contemporary socio-economic needs or dynamics.

### **3.2 Theoretical and Historical Perspectives on the Exclusion of African Philosophy**

The historical exclusion, denial, misconception, inhuman coding of African philosophy, indigenous knowledge systems and other aspects of traditional African culture from formal educational content has already been noted by several scholars (Biakolo, 2000; Sogolo, 1993; Wiredu, 1980; Mudimbe, 1994; Gyekye, 1988; Jacques, 1973; Levi-Strauss, 1996; Levy-Bruhl, 1985). These scholars agree that, historical events of slave trade, colonialism, missionary activities laid the foundation of foreign western education systems in Africa. Today western philosophies of education by Socrates, Plato, Locke, Hume, Bacon, Descartes, only to mention but a few are taught and dominate post-colonial African education systems. However, it will be narrow mindedness to blame only the colonial strategies of governance to the exclusion of African philosophies especially way after independencies. Contemporary hindrances for the inclusion of African philosophy are internal education policy, government will challenges, and philosophy writings of some Western scholars still found in contemporary African libraries.

African scholars further argue that, not only did colonialism, slave trade and missionary activities force Western education and culture to Africans (Arowolo, 2010; Moyana, 1989; Atkinson, 1972; Zvobgo, 1999; Fafunwa and Aisiku, 1982; Datta, 1984;

Thompson, 1984) but subjugated African intellectualism, caused economic hardships, hunger, unemployment and inflation through introduction of monetary exchange economy, Western political ideologies and control. All these Western ways of living challenged the relevance and efficacy of African indigenous civilisation and the purpose, aims and goals of traditional education systems. To further subjugate African civilisations newly introduced Western education system had a low opinion of African philosophy as evidenced in some ethnocentric Western philosophy writers of Aristotle, Jeremy Bentham, George Hegel, John Locke, Friedrich Nietzsche, David Hume, Immanuel Kant (Hegel, 1967, 1974; Neugebauer, 1991; Nietzsche, 1927, 1969; Russell, 1961; Stumpf, 1982; Audi, 1995) who provided the logic that inspired and justified colonialism and enslavement of Africans. Yet 21<sup>st</sup> century African education systems still teach, praise these theorists with so much prestige and respect, and view them as greatest humanitarians.

The relevance of looking back into history of the origins of African philosophy exclusion is based on a single justification. It is partly the purpose of research and academic discourse to correct misconceptions. Many Africans, from general academic discussions, do not see anything sinister about cultural imperialism, dominance of foreign languages as *Lingua Francs* a core requirement for employment and further education. Not only do some Africans see nothing outrageous a foreign language being the official language on African soil, but have embraced foreign languages English/French/Portuguese as their first language not only for business utility. Yet some countries like in Asian that were once colonized like Africa do embrace and speak in their mother tongues internationally including in United Nations Forums. It is so because many Africans are not taught true critical African history and the power-knowledge politics behind language. Africans should appreciate historical facts, to restore lost African pride, like the fact that Greeks and Romans in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, way before 18<sup>th</sup> century recolonization of Africa, learnt Mathematics, Philosophy, Agriculture, Engineering from Ancient Nubian Egypt. According to (Avey, 1961; Edward, 1967; James, 1988) they say most Greece students "*...received instructions directly from Ancient Egypt*", way before Egypt was invaded by Arabs and Israelites. African intellectual legacy was stolen by unfortunate historical happenings that cannot be reversed. The challenge today is that, some Africans unfortunately, had and still are mesmerised by Western languages and Western influenced education so completely that they too look down upon African languages, philosophy of education, African culture, and civilisations.

Considering that some Africans still do not know true African history, one could justify their ignorance to the fact that-education in African schools still hangs onto Western philosophy that conserves Western civilization and reaffirms schooling as a guardian of Western culture literacy and African culture illiteracy. By implication, African children are prepared to be Western knowledge consumers instead of being inventors of their own knowledge and technology. This dilemma is further made worse by limited accessibility to Afrocentric studies, publications and high cost of reading

materials, and access to adequate, efficient internet in most African schools especially in remote rural setups.

### **3.3 Inclusion of African Philosophy**

The critical issue is not just the inclusion of African philosophy; it is the significance and far-reaching importance of indigenous philosophy implications and its vital roles it can play in the contemporary Western orientated African education systems. African philosophy could contribute to social-human development in terms of appreciating multiculturalism, culture liberty and democracy, diversity and above all self-identity and self-actualisation. African philosophy does not only address historical misconceptions but it is a way to preserve African culture, thought and civilisations.

Contemporary world has changed from colonial ethnocentric world, because of social dynamics in power-knowledge politics, even though not totally eradicated. Given world politics changes current African education systems need to reconstruct its curriculum content to accommodate people's growing demands for their inclusion in international community-for respect of their ethnicity, religions and languages. Inclusion of African philosophy and indigenous knowledge systems will not only correct historical misfortunes but enhance democracy, racial equity and cultural freedom so that people can choose to learn, speak their languages, practice their philosophic beliefs and participate in shaping their destinations and be able to choose who they want to be internationally. African education systems including Zimbabwe education system face an urgent challenge in responding to these demands. Countries like China, Japan, Iran, have responded to colonial challenges and manage in their education systems to teach and think in their indigenous languages, they have also managed to develop their economies to top world standards through localised education approaches.

This research argues that multicultural policies, like the inclusion of African philosophy and diverse indigenous knowledge systems are needed today to address injustices historically rooted and socially entrenched. Indigenous philosophy is a proponent, representative of humanity's cultural diversity and has much to contribute in Medicine, Food varieties, Chemistry, Agriculture, Education and many other areas.

### **3.4 Educational Reform and the Social Effectiveness**

Despite these challenges of African education lacking local direction, in the last three decades of post-colonial rule most African educational ministries have attempted to Africanize the curricula (Seidman and Anang, 1992; Barnes, 1982; Berman, 1989; Chikombah, 1988; Court & Kinyanjui, 1986) particularly in History, Social Studies, Literature, Geography and introduction of diverse African Languages from primary to university level. Even though attempts have been initiated, many of much needed reforms have never been implemented. In line to this research, the researcher will argue, as a component of African philosophy, for the inclusion of Philosophy for Children (P4C) or African Philosophy for Children (AP4C) as a compulsory subject at all African primary school grades. Also, inclusion of Philosophy, as a compulsory

discipline, in general at Ordinary and Advanced Secondary/High School, College and University levels. This is not yet practiced in Zimbabwe and other African education systems.

### **3.5 Curriculum and Pedagogy**

Closely associated with the discussion of educational reform and relevant education for Africa, have been debates on how teaching and learning is practiced in most African schools. Most dominating teaching and learning approach being the teacher-centred or 'chalk-and-talk' style. In which the majority of classroom time is spent in 'call- and-response' rote drills and memorization of western theories, formulas, literature, geography, history, art and cultures. Rote-drill pedagogy is criticized by Afrocentric educationists as lacking promotion to teach children critical thinking skills, which is the essence in the discipline of African philosophy, and further alienating Africans from their pre-colonial efficient and effective teaching approaches underpinned by African philosophy of education pedagogies of Communalism, Functionalism, Holism, Essentialism and Humanism (Mudimbe, 1988, 1999; Mudzamba, 1982). African traditional education critical pedagogies which focussed on observable practical consequences and metaphysics, non-examination certificate education, but aimed at educating a person who could be skilled for community develop and also meet personal life needs. If contemporary curricula include African philosophy, African philosophy has a role to play in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom pedagogies that lack multi-application of teaching and learning, that lack education focus of producing a multi-skilled student, who cannot only be employable but understands life essential values (grow food, work, invent and repair technology, read, write, analyse, reason, respect) and above all a person who respect humanity.

### **3.6 Inclusion of African Philosophy in Teacher Education**

Successful inclusion of African philosophy is impossible without collaborative involvement of training teachers who can be specialists in African Studies and African philosophy. Shortage of specialist teachers and higher qualifications in the field of African philosophy causes academic African philosophy to continue playing largely a subaltern and peripheral role in formal education content in Zimbabwe and other African countries in a similar predicament. It is the findings of this research that one of the solutions to eliminate prejudice and discrimination targeted at African philosophy and indigenous knowledge systems is to groom agents of change in the form of teachers, who can teach, influence, advertise and write about the relevance of African philosophy.

At this moment the most important question is, why should teacher education be used as a starting point for the inclusion of African philosophy and indigenous knowledge systems? Teacher education is central to any national information dissemination endeavour; teacher education is an agent of educational change initiation and implementation (Moon, 2010; Schon, 1987; Bishop, 1986; Kincheloe, 2008; Nyagura & Reece, 1990). The achievement and sustainability of introducing African philosophy

in formal education depends largely on the quality of teacher education, calibre of teacher and teacher attitude or perception on the value and importance placed upon teaching youth in their own cultures, as well as using indigenous languages to educate them. Effective teaching is consequential and considerate to human unique needs-a reflective, well trained teacher will not perpetuate distortion, disrespect of indigenous history and knowledge but will preserve and protect cultural characteristics. So to speak effective teaching can address some of Africa's historical educational challenges, like underestimation of African philosophy, by changing and influencing future generation mindsets on indigenous knowledge systems.

The need for training teachers for curriculum change or introducing new aspects in the curriculum is inevitable. It is now widely accepted that an effective course of professional training is highly desirable for curriculum innovation (Adentwi, 2002; Bishop, 1985; Lawton, 1987; McAninch, 1991; Smith & Meux, 1970; Wragg, 1993). Research review further suggests that formally trained teachers are more likely to be effective in introducing or promote a new focus on education like inclusion of African philosophy.

However the responsibility of promoting appreciation of African philosophy does not only lie in the hands of effective teachers and inclusive teacher education, but also on national education policy, the government, resources allocated for that inclusion (Shin et al, 2010; Tecla, 2007; Adapor, 2008; UNESCO, 1985; Rust & Dalin, 1990; Roth, 1999). The major stream of opinion is that successful integration of African philosophy in school knowledge needs a collaborative effort.

#### **4. Conclusions from the Research**

Colonial African education systems were guided and highly influenced by ethnocentric Western philosophies of education. Upon attainment of independence, most new African governments were quick to address quantitative and discriminatory educational challenges but forgot the relevance of introducing their own natural world view in the form of African philosophy and indigenous knowledge systems, as the central educational ideology and orientation to fully set the African mind, soul and body free from both mental and physical colonialism. This research called for an urgent need to include in African school curricula, values of African philosophy, in as much as the educational values inherent in African traditions cannot be over emphasized.

The successful inclusion of African philosophy and related African studies according to research findings can only be sustainable by first training African philosophy of education specialist teachers. So as to initiate, influence to a large African population, and this can only transpire in schools, an Afrocentric mindset in current and future generation. Another suggestion was the call for making African philosophy discourse a compulsory study at all African schooling levels – from primary to tertiary level, this can only be possible with the complementarities of adequate and effective teachers.



This research also acknowledged that call for inclusion of African philosophy is not a new phenomena, but what makes the issue a contemporary debate is the fact that, in most African countries today, despite criticisms and 'bookish approach' weaknesses of western influenced education system, formal education continues to perpetuate systems of education that do not respect African world view by embracing it as a key focus in all educational endeavours.

The trend of pursuing Western-centric philosophies of education in African schools has brought many challenges in Africa's contemporary education systems. Challenges such as, loss of self-identity, self-actualisation, Africans continue to be intellectual consumers of western knowledge furthering Africa's dependence on Western Science, Technology, innovations and inventions, loss of African self-esteem and a platform to contribute in the global knowledge systems. These challenges can only be addressed by Africans themselves through, consistent Afrocentric supportive educational policies, the will-power of the governments to promote an Afrocentric inclined education orientation, publishing Afrocentric thoughts and being proud of African thought and way of seeing the world. Above all the research concluded that inclusion of African philosophy in formal African education systems can improve pedagogies, diversification and democratisation of education in Africa.

#### 4.1 Recommendations

- This was a qualitative philosophical treatise, the researcher felt more evidence can be gather through quantitative survey approaches to gather practical evidence on how many schools, colleges, and universities offer African philosophy as a compulsory discipline or do include African philosophy as a key philosophical orientation in their education system, and also learn on how they manage to take that unique dimension.
- It was the observation by the researcher that , academic books in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana are expensive and far from reach by low to middle economy earners, not only highly priced but limited on the matter under research, hindering further research on African philosophy inclusion or any other related matters. Therefore, review of book prices is recommended to increase access to published literature on African philosophy and related studies.
- Along lines of accessibility, the researcher also observed that publishing in most Southern African countries is quit costly especially in Zimbabwe. Free or low cost publication charges are recommended to boost publishing by Africans especially on Afrocentric matters; this will also be a mediatory measure to end Africa's intellectual dependence on Western sources of literature, of which some can be biased.
- The study of African philosophy should be given first preference to the study of Western philosophies in African schools, colleges and universities.
- In teaching Western philosophies, teachers and lecturers in African setups must not ignore the political dimensions of Western philosophical theories.

- There is need for a paradigm shift to Afrocentric pedagogies in African education systems.

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