

## On Chimakonam's "Africanizing the Philosophy Curriculum Proposal": A Rejoinder from an Open Model Perspective

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v13i2.3>

**Submission: Feb 29, 2024 Acceptance: Nov 21, 2024**

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### Abstract

There is a recent call for the Africanization of the philosophy curriculum in African universities. Though this is a worthwhile venture, we believe care must be taken in adopting a model for the curriculum. Thus, we reject the three models proposed by Chimakonam (the B, C, and D models). The D model proposes that African philosophy content, should totally replace the Western philosophy that presently dominates the curriculum, while the C model demands that African philosophy curriculum, should consist of two equal segments – African and Western philosophy and the student should choose to study whichever he/she wants. The B model on the other hand, advocates for a balance between Western and African philosophy courses. While acknowledging the powerful appeal of these arguments, we think the O (Open) model will be more appropriate. In this model, various philosophical courses in African, Western, Eastern and other regions would be thrown open as electives. We argue that this will give birth to a philosophy curriculum that is not lopsided or marginal in content.

**Keywords:** Africanization, philosophy curriculum, open model, B, C, D model, African philosophy, Jonathan Chimakonam

### Introduction

African philosophy has suffered from slow growth. One reason is that it is unlucky not to have been gifted with a strong tradition like its Western counterpart. This makes most scholars spend their energies and time trying to excavate African philosophy from traditional myths, religions, stories, names, etc. This useful time spent on this retrieval would have enhanced the growth of African philosophy were it focused on addressing substantial issues. Thus, it is particularly refreshing to note that African philosophers are gradually shifting from this energy and time-consuming debates to discussions that promote the growth of the field.

The idea of Africanizing the curriculum is exciting, but the questions that confront a serious philosopher reflecting on the possibility of this will be: what will be the content of this curriculum? Would the materials on African philosophy be sufficient to bring forth a well-equipped university graduate? Is Africa ready for the project of Africanizing the curriculum? We believe that Africa is not yet ready to Africanize the philosophy curriculum because of the dearth of materials on African philosophy as admitted by Bruce Janz (2016, 492). It is true that a lot has been written and continues to be written on African philosophy, but it would

be difficult to take on a full course on African epistemology for instance, without running short of topics to teach. The same could be said of most other branches of African philosophy. For example, it will be an onerous challenge for anyone to develop topics in African aesthetics that would cover a 3 month lecture period without running out of ideas.

On the strength of the above, we argue that Africa is not ready to formulate a full philosophy curriculum that could be called African. It is nevertheless pertinent that such thoughts should begin to be nursed. The idea of Africanizing the African philosophy curriculum will definitely bring to wakefulness those African philosophers who spend time and energy on debates that are fruitless to the necessity of cultivating a philosophy that would merit inclusion in the curriculum as African philosophy. In this light, we think that the project of Africanizing the curriculum, even if it fails today, will spur Africans to churn out philosophies that would make the project succeed tomorrow.

This research does not outrightly support Africanizing the philosophy curriculum in African universities. Attempts to do so now may produce poorly baked African philosophy graduates because philosophy in Africa has not developed enough. We recommend that we wait for some time, while tasking ourselves to enrich the contents of African philosophy. However, when we are ready to Africanize the curriculum, it is the O model that should be adopted, as this will produce balanced philosophy graduates, as will be explained later. But the big question that must first be answered is, what is the need for an Africanized curriculum? This is an important question that will be addressed in the next subheading. The subsequent section will be dedicated to a discussion of the previous suggestions on how the Africanizing of the curriculum should be shaped. Here, Chimakonam's unique contribution to the Africanization debate would be x-rayed and gaps revealed. Thereafter, we will articulate and propose the Open model, as our own contribution to the discourse. This will be followed by the conclusion.

### **Why an Africanized Curriculum is necessary**

A student once asked a question that jolted everyone to the realization that the education curriculum in Africa needs an overhaul. The question is: "why do we tend to know so much about Kant, Plato and other Western philosophers and know little of Nnamdi Azikiwe, who obviously has rich philosophical ideas also"? He was given an answer that is now considered not very satisfactory. He was told that Azikiwe's philosophy is not well known because Africans do not cherish what is theirs. What this entails is that the structuring of the curriculum is the main problem, not just philosophy education. In other words, the entire educational system in many places in Africa is problematic for undermining indigenous systems. Many years after independence, Nigeria and other African countries still follow the system of education designed by the colonial West, with its foreign ideals. Babs Fanfunwa, in support of this, noted that many years after independence, the Nigerian system of education still followed that of Britain "so closely in structure, administration and content" (1982, 205). The Phelps-Stokes Report of 1992 also condemned the education given to Africans as outdated and that the missions "were following the ideals prevailing in their home countries" (ADESINA 1988, 21). Other philosophers like Hallen (2010, 83), Chimakonam &

Nweke (2018, 281), Bisong (2019, 22), have also criticized seriously the curriculum of education in Africa.

Due to these criticisms, a lot of committees have been erected, policies made and memoranda reached to set up the curriculum so that it will adapt education to “the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples” (ADESINA 1988, 39). In spite of these efforts, critics still believe that the best that could come out of this curriculum is simply a graduate who is “a Nigerian in blood but English in opinion, morals and intellect” (FAFUNWA 1982, 3).

A survey of the websites of many African universities indicates that their philosophy curricula consist of 95 per cent of courses in Western philosophy (in that, Western philosophy is the focus). The remaining 5 per cent is a mixture of African philosophy and Oriental philosophy, etc., African philosophy is just a course in the curriculum of departments of philosophy in Africa, though it is gradually unfolding and may likely take new dimensions in the nearest future (see ETIEYIBO and CHIMAKONAM 2016, 3). Imagine what would become of a student drilled through this sort of curriculum. As Fafunwa rightly noted, this sort of curriculum could only produce a graduate with a fragmented personality. In this same way, a philosophy curriculum that is largely Western and partially African could produce African graduates who may be out of touch with their environment. This is possibly the case if we consider that after many decades of independence and Western education in Africa, education received in and by many Africans has largely failed to transmit the sort of transformation noticeable in the West.

In the West, there is evidence that their educational curriculum has translated to tremendous advancement in science, technology and socio-political organization. The same is not clearly visible in Africa, which is a testament to the reality that educational curriculum foisted on Africa might be defective and probably does not suit the African. This is possibly so because as argued by Obafemi Awolowo (1968, 45), the level of education of a country is directly proportional to the level of productivity of the citizens. Ahmadu Bello (1957, 11) had this in mind, when he argued that the main reason why southern Nigeria is more advanced in terms of development than the North is the level of education in both regions. A. Akinlua, in line with the above, observes that colonial education was “devoid of reality and thus will have little impact on Africa, especially with regards to the transmission of her cultural heritage” (2014, 95). His argument is that the colonial curriculum reflects colonial values and has no bearing on African existential circumstances. Also, K. Harris argues in support of this thus: “this system of education seeks to annul the critical consciousness of students, spawns ideologies which makes the student to see the world as a place of already formed ideas ... devoid of infinite possibility of African experience.” (1979, 89). This sort of education would not translate to development as needed by Africa, which means Africanizing the curriculum is of dire necessity.

From the above, we can infer that the curricula foisted on Africa have obviously failed to significantly impact on individuals and society. The philosophy curriculum too, like other curricula, has not fared better. African philosophy has remained stunted as a result of this. Like other curricula, the philosophy curriculum in Africa parades mostly Western contents, with little or nothing of

Africa. Even many textbooks on the history of philosophy clearly leave out African philosophy. Commenting on this, Mogobe Ramose argues that:

The Italian, D. Composta, and Copleston, totally reject a historical and scientific African philosophy of ancient black Egypt and its subsequent influence on and relation with early Greek philosophy ... F.C. Copleston (1907-1985), an American Catholic clergyman, is a typical twentieth-century European representative of the view which denies and severs all historical philosophical links of ancient Egypt with Greece and Rome. (2005, 5)

Even the personal testimonies of Aristotle, as to the contribution of ancient Egypt to the development of the philosophical science of mathematics and astronomy, were deliberately ignored. One expects that this epistemic injustice perpetrated by the West against Africa would be corrected by Africans themselves. Unfortunately, even some textbooks on history of philosophy written by Africans themselves still follow the general form presented by Westerners.

The seeming conclusion to this is that some Westerners and Africans themselves have agreed that there is no contribution of African philosophy to the universal philosophy worth mentioning. Consequently, this debases and the quality of philosophy done in and by Africans. This conclusion is one that is indirectly transmitted to many African students – a conclusion that really deepens their inferiority complex. Unfortunately, this is the conclusion that majority of the students drilled in this Westernized curriculum end up reaching. If everything about philosophy is Western, then it means they have superior reasoning power, which implies that they are superior, which further implies that we need to learn to be like them. This informs why many people want to be, act and dress like the Westerners. The curriculum portrays them as superior and aided by unwitting tutorship by Africans themselves, the students form a negative impression of Africa – an impression that may guide his/her life forever.

The realization (as informed by the curriculum) that Africans are inferior intellectually to Westerners, could build up pessimism in African philosophers, who may be compelled to accept this falsehood as truthful. Harris argues that it was part of the plan of the West to build up graduates, who would think the world is already a well-structured place with nothing to be added. In his words:

This system of education seeks to annul the critical consciousness of students, spawns ideologies which makes the student to see the world as a place of already formed ideas with specific social and historical contexts within which he shall do his living and learning devoid of infinite possibility of African experience but as relatively fixed and stable structure. The aim of this system of education is to bring about submissive consciousness where individuals who are produced by this social and ideological apparatuses and institutions are formed with habits, attitudes and conceptions which presents the existing system as natural and unquestionably given. (1979, 89)

The above is possibly the reason most philosophy graduates and lecturers seldom create new ideas, they seem to have reached the conclusion that nothing new can

be said that has not been said by the West. This is what we have observed throughout our years of supervising and examining postgraduate students in Nigeria. They merely content themselves with the application of the existing ideas from the West to social situations. Such is the main trend in the researches and thesis writing of most scholars in Africa. If everything is well structured as the curriculum portrays, then all that is left to be done, according to their thinking, is to apply the existing ideas to situations. This has contributed greatly to the slow growth of philosophy in Africa. One overarching reason, therefore, why the philosophy curriculum in Africa needs to be Africanized, is that, it will overcome the negative effects Westernized curriculum produce in philosophy students and graduates. An Africanized curriculum would bar inferiority complex from taking centre stage in the minds of students and graduates of philosophy. The realization that Africans are capable of putting up elaborate ideas and systems of philosophy that would equal or outshine that of Westerners, would imbue an optimistic spirit in the students. This optimistic spirit is a springboard for great exploits in philosophy, hence the need to Africanize the curriculum.

One other good reason why the philosophy curriculum needs to be Africanized in African universities, is the difficulty some African teachers of Western philosophy encounter due to cultural differences. Because the worldview that underlies Western philosophy is different from the African worldview, many Africans struggle to fully understand the cultural inspiration of Western philosophy. This affects not just the African teacher but the African learner of Western philosophy. Emphasis must, however, be placed on teacher-preparedness since the chances of learners are improved when transmission is good. The “importance of good quality teachers to qualitative educational delivery cannot be overemphasized. The Nigerian Policy on Education in recognition of this declares that no education can rise above the quality of its teachers” (EKANEM & BISONG, 2021, 15). Ukeje Onyerisara collaborates the above when he argues that “a programme of education that would lead to social regeneration or reconstruction, must ensure that whatever content is received by the learner should have the assurance that it has been well transmitted” (2004, 89). The teachers who are the main transmitters of philosophical ideas must be versed so as to translate and transmit effectively – Africanizing the philosophy curriculum will make this possible in the field of philosophy.

Chimakonam and Nweke, in consonance with the above, believe that “the prevailing curriculum of philosophy education in most institutions of formal education...in Africa, is significantly Western, both in terms of content and approach and this has had a telling effect on the quality of philosophy graduates produced in these institutions” (2018, 280). This makes it imperative to Africanize the philosophy curriculum in African institutions.

An Africanized curriculum would bring philosophy back home to African teachers and learners. Since every philosophical tradition sprouts from an indigenous worldview, Africanizing philosophy is an indirect grounding of philosophy in African cultural worldview. This would make philosophy natural to both the African teacher and learner, making it possible for an average lecturer to understand and interpret effectively to the students. What then would be the nature of this curriculum? Chimakonam has made frantic efforts to answer this all-important question, but we feel the question is yet to be satisfactorily answered.

### **Chimakonam's Models of Africanizing the Philosophy Curriculum**

The philosophy curricula in African universities are so 'Western-centred' that most philosophy graduates of African schools could sing about Plato, Aristotle, Kant etc., but know little or nothing about Nyerere or Senghor. This does not seem right, which is why we support the argument for Africanizing the philosophy curriculum in African universities. However, we do not support a curriculum that would tilt the students to the other extreme – Afrocentricism. This is the ground on which we reject the D model (Displacement model) proposed by Chimakonam. According to Chimakonam, the D model entails the complete development of a "set of African philosophy curricula to displace the existing curricula in universities in Africa, which are structured with courses in Western philosophy" (2016, 515). To employ the displacement method is to take away one extreme and replace it with another extreme. The disadvantages that followed Westernized curriculum would definitely trail the Africanized curriculum. One such disadvantage is that it will deny Africans access to the rich academic resources in Western philosophy. Though we have argued against Western curriculum foisted on Africans, this does not mean there is nothing good in Western philosophy. To totally dislodge Western philosophy is not a good option. A better curriculum should allow the tapping of all possible resources.

Chimakonam's C model (Competition model), proposes that one department should have two units; one for the study of purely African philosophy and the other for the study of purely Western philosophy. This model sounds good since it breeds competition, which is a good source of growth, but it does not solve the problem; it could groom ethnocentric philosophers. A true philosophy education should be devoid of ethnocentrism. One half (those in the Western philosophy unit) might turn out to be Eurocentric. The other half (those in the African philosophy unit) might turn out to be Afrocentric. It is unlikely that any members of these two groups would have a balanced philosophical orientation. This is the reason why we would have favoured, the B model, if not for the reason that it is not actually an African curriculum. According to Chimakonam, the B model is an approach where the curriculum of philosophy is adjusted in such a "way that there is a balance between courses in both Western and African philosophies" (2016, 515). A curriculum that has a balance of African philosophy and Western philosophy cannot justifiably be termed African. If it could be truly called African, then it logically follows that it could also be called a Western curriculum because they both share equal parts. To Africanize, we understand it to mean, to make it more African. But in the B model, the curriculum is not more African but constitutes equal components from the two segments. To be more African, the curriculum must contain more African content than Western. Aside from this, we do not think it is wise to place unequal parts equally. The Western philosophy is more developed and advanced than African and thus could fare better in competition than African philosophy. To place the two in a competition is akin to placing a professor of philosophy alongside a year one student of philosophy. The professor will definitely fare better than the year one student. Chimakonam seems to have noticed the weaknesses of his models, that in a later paper titled 'Why the Politics against African Philosophy should be discontinued,' co-authored with Victor Nweke, he distanced himself a little from these models and brought forth a new one, he calls the "P model" (2018, 284).

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In the P model, Chimakonam and Nweke attempted to liberalize the African curriculum by accommodating philosophies from other regions besides the West and Africa. They believe that other regions also have rich content that could benefit an African student, and thus should be incorporated into the African curriculum to ensure that all-round graduates would be produced. We admit that this is a better model than the previous ones, but really believe that a curriculum developed from this, would not justifiably stand as an Africanized curriculum. Chimakonam and Nweke must have seen the weakness in this proposal, which may be why they indicated that this is not a model for “Africanizing” the curriculum but for “decolonizing” it (2018, 285). Since our main concern is not on decolonizing the curriculum but Africanizing it, we should not really engage with Chimakonam and Nweke on this, but it is good to note that this P model fails as did the B model to make African content to be more in the curriculum. To give all regions a fair share in the curriculum does not rationally make it an African curriculum per se. For instance, if Africans could claim that such a curriculum following such a model is African, then the East could also have a claim on it, so also could the West or Latin America, because all regions are equally represented in the curriculum. We contend that an Africanized curriculum must have more African content than that of other regions. It is in the light of these defects observed in these proposed models that we think it expedient to propose a better model, which is termed the O model (Open model).

### **The O (Open) Model of Curriculum Development**

In the Open model (O model), the curriculum is molded in part by the students themselves and in part by the educationists. The various courses in African, Western and other regions’ philosophy should be thrown open as electives. The student will be required to choose the needed number of courses from the mix to form his or her curriculum. To give the curriculum an African bend, the African philosophy courses to be chosen should be more in number than others. The ratio should be 4:3. In selecting their elective courses from the pool of courses available, the percentage of African courses chosen should be more than that of other regions combined. This means that if a student is to offer 17 courses, for instance, he/she would pick 8 African courses, 6 would come from Western, Eastern, Latin America etc., and the remaining 3 would be compulsory courses.

The compulsory courses would be courses that encourage criticality and creativity in students. Thus, courses like critical thinking, logic in all its dimensions, creative reasoning etc would form the bulk of the compulsory courses. The reasoning is that, if students are raised with a culture of criticality and rational creativity, they will develop the ability to apply this criticality and creativity in life. Moreover, the immediate realities they would encounter would mostly be unique blend of African cultures. This reflection on African culture and realities would produce African philosophy easily, devoid of force and compulsion.

The beauty of the O model is that it not only introduces the students to more African philosophy, but also, non-coercively lures the students into doing African philosophy. The best and easiest way to produce African philosophers is to raise creative and critical graduates. They would philosophize naturally and their immediate environment would prompt their philosophizing, which would make it African. Western philosophy was not consciously directed. It took the

shape and form it took freely. African philosophy must be allowed to grow that way to imbue the students with the right critical mindset, and they will set out to do philosophy, which will naturally be African since it will be derived from the culture and worldviews of the immediate African environment.

On the basis of the above, we argue that the O model of curriculum development would fare better and would produce students with a rich blend of philosophical orientations from Africa and other regions of the world. Thus, in addition to relieving Africans of the psychological distress occasioned by having to follow a curriculum set by the Westerners, it would produce more graduates who would philosophize and consequently bring forth a rich source of literature to enhance the development of African philosophy. This sort of curriculum is African, not merely because of its content, but also because of its aim. It will be formed by Africans to produce graduates who would do African philosophy and not merely those who would be loaded with the history of African philosophy. Africa, currently does not need those who know African philosophy (as the curriculum model proposed by Chimakonam would do), but those who would actually philosophize. Thus, we need a curriculum that would prompt students to philosophize.

The O model of curriculum development will allow students to choose their courses and education not entirely teacher-centred. The importance of making one's own choices cannot be overemphasized. It boosts motivation, increases one's sense of responsibility and encourages hard work. We do not think that foisting a curriculum on students is the best approach in education. The students should be allowed to take part in the decision-making regarding curriculum formation and preference and the O model guarantees that

Thus, a striking feature about the O model is that it proposes a curriculum that is not only student-centred but society-centred. The compulsory courses would be designed to prepare students for society as agents of development by inculcating critical and creative thinking abilities. This makes the curriculum society-centred as well as student-centred, since students can make their independent input in choosing courses that match their unique abilities. This special blend of student-centredness and society-centredness has been promoted by Bisong and Ekanem (2019), who argued that such would make education in Africa better to accelerate Africa's development. They argue that the child and society must be considered for a curriculum to meet the development target of Africa. As they put it, "child-centred education alone will leave most of the manpower needs of the society unmet. Society-centred education alone, on the other hand, will leave the child unfulfilled. A complementary philosophy of education (child-centred and society-centred) will satisfy the needs of the student as well as that of the society" (2019, 26). Well-educated persons through their ideas and theories "make work easier for others and thereby raising their productivity and by extension providing a better standard of living for the populace. Poorly educated persons hardly contribute anything to others, rather they add up to constitute a high dependency ratio on the government" (BISONG 2018, 218). Further, a well-structured curriculum should "emancipate the individual... also aim at equipping the learner with sufficient and necessary skills and abilities that should help him to function creditably and maximally in his society so as to guarantee [sic] increase in productivity, growth and development"



(ROBERTS 1971, 64). On the whole, the O model, if deployed, can yield a curriculum, not just in philosophy but in other disciplines that would produce effective graduates to drive the continent's development.

### **Conclusion**

The challenge facing education in Africa, is one that African scholars should no longer ignore. One of the greatest challenges is poor and inadequate curriculum. We have argued that this Westernized curriculum needs an overhaul and to be replaced by an Africanized curriculum. However, we do not recommend the overhaul right away. We need time to build up materials for the new curriculum contents. However, while the preparation is underway, we think it necessary to begin an examination of different curriculum models in order to identify the one that can enhance African philosophy and education in general when the time comes. This is a matter of grave importance because a wrong choice could nose-dive the educational sector of the continent. It is in consideration of this that we present the O model for critical examination.

### **Declarations**

\*The authors declare no conflict of interest or ethical issues for this work

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