



THE INDISPENSABLE PLACE OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE CURRICULUM OF SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY DEGREE EDUCATION: A REFLECTION

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Abstract

This paper presents the recent African Renaissance approach in the academic discipline of philosophy in South Africa and its exceedingly rich values in critical thinking and African identity, as indispensable in the curriculum of South Africa's university education. Its argument comes against the backdrop of seeming public disdain and lukewarm attitude towards philosophy as a discipline, and general criticism of the discipline in the South African context as "boring and abstract". The main thesis is that the overt sentiment that philosophy does neither teach practical skills nor produce physical or material needs in modern South African society; and hence, has limited relevance in the decolonisation curriculum agenda of academic degrees lacks merit. In contrast, if the very purpose of university education in South Africa remains "to produce well-educated" African students, African renaissance-based philosophy should occupy a very important place in the reform and decolonisation agenda of the academic

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curriculum of university degree programs in South Africa. By its nature, such philosophy focus in the curricula promises to be one of the best approaches to help students imbibe logical reasoning; pay attention to the unrelenting pursuit of true knowledge; and continuously commit to sets of given and verified truths, yet search for new ways to improve and justify established truths within their disciplines. Adoption of such focus can also provide the foundation upon which accepted theories, hypotheses, and arguments of other degree programs can re-developed.

Keywords: *African renaissance, educated, Philosophy, Skill acquisition, University education, Critical thinking, University degree programs.*

Introduction

The emerging calls for reform and the decolonisation of the South African university education system to reflect its contemporary technological and social problems have fostered a new way of seeing university education degrees, namely as a vehicle for acquiring practical skills for job and economic development (Wolff, 2016). Basing their argument on the utilitarian components, proponents of this school of thought have in many cases singled out social science and humanity disciplines such as philosophy, history, sociology, and other related studies, which do not pigeonhole students into one straight jacket technocrats as “less important” and “irrelevant for university degree programs”(Colgan & Maxwell, 2020; Ukpokolo & Omotade Adegbindin, 2016). They argue that as such disciplines do not offer a direct route for acquiring technical skills or acquiring direct employment after graduation, they have lost their relevance for inclusion in the academic curriculum of university degree programs. Some of the reoccurring questions used to justify this view include: Will the student of these disciplines find a job at the end of his/her university study? How much money would the university graduate earn when they find jobs after graduating with such degrees? What is the relevance of such university studies, when they are irrelevant in the contemporary job market?

The above "return on investment" way of thinking, as Deresiewicz (2014, p. 77) tags it, is valuable, in the sense that it can help universities focus on discerning the possible pecuniary gains that may eventually accrue from the degree programs they provide; however, over-reliance on such understanding of the role of university education reduces universities to merely “skill acquisition centers”. This takes university education away from its supposed role in South African society. Historically, universities in both South Africa and other communities

around the world, have a bigger mandate: a place for engaging in critical thinking, intellectual exploration, and the pursuit of knowledge across various disciplines (American Philosophical Association, 2007/2008; Sesanti, 2019). Its mandate encompasses the development of analytical abilities, creativity, and a deep understanding of complex ideas, which extend beyond seeing it as a place for the mere acquisition of technical skills. It also incorporates the cultivation of virtues such as empathy, resilience, and integrity, which are essential for navigating the complexities of professional and personal life (Wolff, 2016). Reducing universities merely to the level of skill acquisition programs risks producing students, who are equipped with technical practical abilities but lack the capacity for ethical reasoning, cultural appreciation, and social-civic responsibilities: what Fredman (2003, p. 54) has in another context regarded as “well-rounded and educated individuals”. Moreover, the value of individual economic utility incorporates an advancement of knowledge, a promotion of intellectual curiosity, and an understanding of social cohesion and democratic values, required to be successful in human society. Humanity and social science modules, particularly philosophy which provides the most systematised way of logical reasoning, pay the most attention to the unrelated pursuit of true knowledge, and continuously commit to finding new ways for arriving at new knowledge within the academia (American Philosophical Association, 2007/2008), helps the university to fulfill this purpose.

In light of the recent call for a decolonised university education curriculum in South Africa (Fomunyam & Teferra, 2017; Senekal & Lenz, 2020; Sesanti, 2019; Wolff, 2016), there is a need to reflect on the value of the discipline of philosophy as a supplier of elective modules for other academic disciplines. The research question is: what should be the place of the discipline of philosophy in the university degree curricula framework, given that its theoretical base does not necessarily fit into the modern mode of particularities and professionalism of the South African 21st-century job market? The idea with this question is to draw both from the discipline’s history and its current focus in South African universities, to explain its value in the advancement of knowledge and development of solutions to the social, political, and economic problems in the contemporary South African context.

The paper proceeds as follows. Firstly, a presentation of the meaning and essence of the academic discipline of philosophy in general, as being taught in South African universities. Through this discussion, the paper presents a general view of philosophy, which helps dismiss the false accusation that philosophy is useless in the 21st Century. Secondly, a critical discussion of the history of philosophy as a discipline in South university education, as well as

the recent focus of the discipline. The idea here is to shed light on the untapped state of philosophy, its critical thinking characteristics, and its ability to show itself as the foundation of academic inquiry and the core of what is needed for the development of an all-inclusive educated human person within the South African university social space. Lastly, a provision of critical analysis of how philosophy is at the core of university education, from the meaning of education in particular and university education in general.

1. Philosophy As An Academic Discipline

To properly grapple with the question of the importance and the place of philosophy in the university degree curricula framework in South Africa, it is important to delineate the general meaning of philosophy in the university education landscape. However, the idea is not to delve into the scholarly debates of the different definitions of philosophy, but rather, to draw from the several concepts of philosophy, to position the discipline, as indispensable for inclusion in the South African university education curriculum.

Apart from the traditional etymological definition of philosophy as *philos* and *sophia*, which literally translates to "love of wisdom" (Sweet, 2020), philosophy has been defined within the university education landscape by William James (1978, p.7) as inquiry which "deals with the principles of explanation that underlie all things without exception – the elements common to all men, gods, animals, and stones – the first whence and the last whither of the whole cosmic procession, the condition of all-knowing and the most general order of human conduct." This definition arguably draws from Aristotle's traditional understanding that philosophy is the bedrock of humanity's essential exercise, with the three principle faculties: reason, reflection, and introspection (Judson, 2019; Golitsis, 2021). In philosophising therefore, the student simply fulfills the highest intellectual height attainable by the human mind.

Other than its connection to humanity's ability to fulfil her rational essence, philosophy is also conceptualised as "an attempt to provide a coherent and systematic account of human experience" (Okolo, 2019, p. 11). It is according to Fredman (2003, p. 54), "the quest to arrive at beliefs that are as conceptually clear, experientially confirmed, and rationally coherent". This means, by its nature, philosophy is critical, reflective and coherent. It is as John Dewey (2024) notes inherently criticism, having its distinctive position among various modes of criticism in its generality as criticism of criticisms as it were. Taken from these prisms, philosophy can be said to be the systematic approach, through which human minds can be freed from bias and prejudice, as well as enlarge its perceptions of the world around them. In the academic

discipline of philosophy, students are provided with the tools to systematically evaluate their human experiences. In philosophy study, students as Sahakian and Sahakiah (1970, p. 4) puts it are provided with the material for “critical evaluation of all facts of experience.” Philosophy is the critical analysis of the human experience.

Philosophy has also been described as the discipline that asks unending questions” (Fredman, 2003, 54). What the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger called *essen Fragen* (asking Further) ...the restless calling to question, the presuppositions of other areas for knowledge” (Von Weizacha cited in Anibueze, 1998, p. 9). Philosophy as a discipline provides the tools for students to engage in difficult and follow-up questions about human existence. What this means is that Philosophy by its nature asks further important questions about life and human experiences. This includes the famous four ontological questions developed by Immanuel Kant– “What can I know?”, “What ought I to do?”, “What can I hope for?” and “What is man?”¹⁹ Through such questions, individuals can make sense of their essence and existence in human society.

Furthermore, philosophy is known as the system of study that provides the structure for understanding the most fundamental history and structures of human existence. The academic discipline of philosophy often does this through an analysis of texts and thoughts of previous philosophers. This can include, but is often not limited to :a) the philosophers’ attitude towards life and the universe; b) the philosophers’ methods of reflective thinking and rational inquiry; c) a view of their lived experience; d) the logical analysis of their languages and the clarifications of the meaning of words and concepts, and e) an analysis of their problems, theories and solutions proffered by the philosophers to solve their problem. In “doing philosophy”, the student does not just read the texts, they also engage with them in a sort of philosophical active learning. The central component of this conceptualisation of philosophy is that philosophy involves “active learning”. In analysing texts and engaging with the thoughts of previous philosophers, students see texts as not unquestionable authorities, but as meriting further clarification, interpretation, critical challenge, and development. In doing this, they adopt attitudes of benign skepticism and puzzlement that help them become more active and independent inquirers.

It is from the above concept of philosophy that the idea of studying the history of Western society through the analysis of the lives and thoughts of Western philosophers is common in most philosophy departments around the world (Colgan & Maxwell, 2020; Lawhead, 2003). The idea is that the study of philosophy and thoughts of these philosophies often rob the

students. By studying the thoughts of these philosophers, the students are inter alia exposed to the logical reasoning and philosophical thinking underpinning the experiences of the philosophers. Even when this exposure appears more like “an intellectual wine-tasting party, where you just ‘sample’ opinions of various philosophers and just enjoy their flavors, as flavors, they affect the taste buds of the students” (Lawhead, 2003, p. 10). Exposure to the philosophical writings and thoughts of previous philosophers also re-orient students' taste choices; help them form their own opinions (philosophy) and create their worldviews (Colgan & Maxwell, 2020). It can also help students (through association) to begin to hazard a framework of their own beliefs, as well as reassess their origins, strengths, and weaknesses.

In other instances, the discipline of philosophy has also been conceived as the provider of the foundation for theories and hypotheses of other academic disciplines (American Philosophical Association (2007/2008). In other words, it underlies other specific sciences that exist within university education. This is why there exists in many contexts, “a philosophy” for every academic discipline. Typical examples include the philosophy of politics, philosophy of medicine, philosophy of law, philosophy of engineering, philosophy of science etc. Such philosophy-based modules provide the rational foundation for the core theoretical truths of other disciplines. They are the basis upon which these specific disciplines stand.

The idea of how other academic disciplines’ are fundamentally dependent on philosophy was well captured by Rene Descartes (1983) when he built the famous “philosophical tree of knowledge” in his *Principles of Philosophy*. The tree according to Descartes (1983) has metaphysics as the roots, physics as the trunk, and three branches as the specific sciences that have been most useful to man – medicine and mathematics and Morals” (Descartes, 1983). Descartes' point was that metaphysics as the core of philosophy provides the foundation upon which other discipline evolves. While it is the root, other disciplines are the trunk and the branches.

Descartes' justification of philosophy as the foundation of other modules has been supported by many philosophers. Commenting on the idea, Donald Uchenna Omenukor (2019, p. 565) wrote the following:

It is in metaphysics that an absolutely certain and secure epistemological foundation is discovered. It is metaphysics that grounds the knowledge of the geometrical properties of bodies, which is the basis of physics. Physics is the trunk that grows directly from the roots and provides the basis for the rest of the sciences. And in these sciences, the fruits of the philosophy tree can be

plucked. Thus the fruits are found on the branches and not on the roots, although the branches cannot stand without the roots. So it becomes a category mistake to begin to look for orange fruits for instance in the roots of the orange instead of the branches.

This means philosophy remains a very important part of other disciplines. It remains the root through which other disciplines that serve the specific needs of humanity evolve. Any area of study, be it medicine, nursing, law, or economics – all of which confer particular skills is just a specific science, dealing with specific aspects of philosophy, and as such, a branch of the philosophy, which is the tree, and reality as a whole. It is a misnomer to attempt to relegate mother philosophy to the background while trying to pluck the fruits of its branches as specific sciences cannot stand without their roots (metaphysics-philosophy).

Lastly, from a moral perspective, philosophy has also been conceptualised within its discipline as the tool to regulate how humans engage in their professional life (American Philosophical Association, 2007/2008; Omenulor, 2019). As a body of knowledge, philosophy has been drawn to provide both the regulatory mechanism and the guiding instrument through which individuals navigate different professional endeavors. This is how Omenulor (2019) explains it, concerning its role in other human professions:

“While the different professionals in the different fields may be concerned with the pursuit of the main goals within their professions, persons say (for example, the politician may be only concerned with power even if it means killing others; the industrialist with maximal production; the oil explorer with drilling oil, the capitalist with profit and so with others); philosophy provides the framework with which man carries out his duty in these professions, without compromising his dignity and welfare in the process” (p.567).

Philosophy’s ability to serve as a tool for ethics is arguably very significant for engagement in different human professions. In the course of the study of philosophy in the university education system, students are exposed to different modules such as 1) theories of right and wrong moral conduct (Ethics), 2) theories of the nature and destiny of man (philosophical Anthropology), 3) theories of how to organise the human society and choose leaders for the happiness of the majority (socio-political philosophy), 4) theories of value system, and 5) how to make meaning out of life’s issues amid others (existentialism) etc. Through these modules, they develop correct conduct for engaging in their chosen professions. In engaging with the modules, the students’ minds are also challenged and liberated, to develop critically tested

approaches and ideas on how to deal with challenges within their society. This is how Amaku (2019, p.9) puts it:

“In the course of studying philosophy, the student learns how to employ reason to examine the veracities of cultural practices, beliefs in the existence of the gods, the origin of the universe, the mathematical structures of things, the nature of education, the laws of nature, the nature of morality and knowledge, the ideals of social and political life so forth.”

In other words, the student of philosophy learns ratio-cognitive ways to think through and regulate the different aspects of human existence.

Based on the above concepts of philosophy, it is safe to deduce some important characteristics of philosophy for the study: a) an academic platform to enable students to attain the highest intellectual capacity of the human mind; b) a compendium of rigorous study and critical examination of fundamental questions concerning the existence, human knowledge, values, language and norms of the human society; c) a bundle of historical and rational inquiry for understanding the nature of reality and existence; d) the foundational platform for justifying every human endeavour, and e) finally, a compendium of coherent epistemological modules that provides a systematic understanding of human intellectual engagement and morality. These mean that philosophy as an academic discipline is very encompassing, yet focused. It is notably “not the presentation or committing to mind inert body of ideas and knowledge”, as Gbari and Odo (2001, p 200) point out; but rather, a bundle of knowledge and human inquiry for unraveling all human reality in a systematic approach. These include introducing coherency and seeking to put order and wholeness in disordered thought and experiences of human intellectual engagement.

2. Philosophy as an Academic Discipline within the South African University Education System

As in most countries in Africa, the study of philosophy as an academic discipline has exhibited a venerable lineage, that dates back to the inception of university education in the continent (Mathebula, 2019). Originating as one of the foundational pursuits within the Western Christocentric academic canon in the 20th century, the discipline and its modules weretypically part of the integral component of a broader curricular framework that encompassed the humanities or liberal arts at the dawn of university education in South Africa (Johann, 1998).

At its inception, the philosophy discipline integrally functioned as the provider of the theoretical frameworks and epistemological underpinnings for other disciplinary domains within the academic milieu (Mathebula, 2019). The discipline mostly existed as part of other social or arts degree programs within the humanities or social science faculties. These include history, sociology, theology, and literature studies. In these departments, philosophy scholars were often hosted as faculty members who specialised in various philosophical themes. With this, they were able to engage in collaborative research that enlarged the scope of philosophy in the institutions. It was not until after the 1920s that philosophy developed as an independent department in universities such as the University of Pretoria, the University of Capetown, Rhodes University, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), and the Stellenbosch University. Here, philosophy departments has remained integral parts of the humanities and social science disciplines, which in most cases offered philosophy degree programs and modules in the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs that cover a wide range of philosophical traditions (Mathebula, 2019). Such modules include the history of Western philosophy, ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, political philosophy, philosophy of education, philosophy of law, environmental philosophy, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and existentialism and philosophy of science. Through these modules, philosophers have emphasised the importance of critical thinking and on a range of existential issues, within the new African philosophy paradigm.

Notably, the recent focus of philosophy departments in African philosophy and related issues in recent times within the South African education framework has not always been linear. During the earlier stages of the existence of the discipline at the universities, philosophy focused mostly on Western intellectual discourse. Inquiries predominantly gravitated towards the examination and explication of Western philosophical traditions, which is reflective of the institutional origins and Western intellectual ties from which initial scholars in the disciplines and universities derived. Because of this, there was a notable dearth of attention towards traditional African philosophical paradigms or rich indigenous African intellectual heritage within the discipline. It was not until the 1960s, that philosophical discourse in South African universities began to pay more attention to the exploration of African philosophical paradigms and their rich intellectual heritage.

The focus on African philosophy has further been expanded during the struggle against apartheid and in the post-apartheid era, to include more emphasis on African indigenous traditions alongside the study of Western philosophy. Here, universities such as the Rhodes

University, the University of Cape Town (UCT), the University of Witwatersrand, the University of Pretoria, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), and the Stellenbosch University had specific research centers or institutes dedicated to African inquiry and scholarship. With the dismantling of apartheid and less emphasis on the system of Christian National Education, philosophers have formulated a new philosophical discourse that reclaims and celebrates African culture, heritage, and identity, as well as addresses the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. Proponents argue that through a renewed focus on African voices, values, traditions, socio-political structures, economic empowerment, and developments, which are rooted in African principles, Africans will be able to demonstrate their humanity, experience their collective progress and revitalise their roles in global affairs (Diop, 1996; 2000). In the last 3 decades, this new narrative has provided a framework for the movement of the reversal of the organised subjugation of the cultural, scientific, and economic life of people on the African continent (Higgs, 2016; Maloka, 2001; More, 2002; Sesanti, 2016a; 2019; Xulu, 2015) and, the subjugation of indigenous knowledge systems, which has impacted African people's way of seeing themselves and acting in their social, political and economic space-the birth of African renaissance.

In the last three decades, the philosophical narratives in the African Renaissance have continued to dominate philosophical discourse in South African universities. In the last few years, it has become a beacon for re-constructing an identity of the African individual that is different from the previously apologetic Western Eurocentric constructed identity (Maloka, 2001; Sesanti, 2016b). The discourse has remained one of the South African philosophers' foundational resources for formulating the needed social, economic political, and educational transformation in the South African political space (Landsberg & Hlophe, 1999; Jili, 2000). The concept also incorporates the African indigenous philosophers' understanding of how Africans can politically and economically liberate themselves within their communities (Landsberg & Hlophe, 1999). This includes assuming the indigeneity of their African indigenous identity and aspiring to live authentic lives that are devoid of political and economic dependence on the West. It also includes formulating epistemological and theoretical principles that aid Africans in solving their unique social and economic problems, whether from the existing new Western-influenced realities or their indigenous traditional knowledge systems. In the university degree education curriculum framework precisely, the African Renaissance can be invoked as a concept to help in the development of African philosophy modules, which imbibe indigenous knowledge and systematized analytic reasoning skills for different degrees

in the university education system. Arguably, the philosophical narratives in the African Renaissance can provide resources with which students critically evaluate complex ideas within their disciplines, as well as formulate foundational arguments that are essential and valuable for an optimal academic engagement at the university education level. It can also provide resources, that ignite effective pedagogical strategies and a broader systemic longing for self-development. These multi-faceted roles of African Renaissance-based approach make philosophy indispensable for inclusion in the framework of South African university education curriculum.

3. African Renaissance, Critical Thinking and University Education Curriculum

If degree programs aim to develop habits of careful, critical reasoning² for students to engage in problems within their discipline (Higgs, 2016), then African renaissance-based philosophy modules are especially well-suited for a role in the development of university degree curricula. Firstly, African philosophy modules which are based on the ideas within the African Renaissance can help students to develop both their capacity and their inclination to do critical thinking. Other disciplines can also help in fulfilling this function, however, African-based philosophy contributes distinctively, intensively, and extensively to a student's ability to think critically in terms of current realities around him (Higgs, 2016; Kugara & Mdhuli, 2023; Wolff, 2016; Xulu, 2015). This is largely because of its focus on African modes of thought. More specifically, African renaissance-based modules contribute admirably to curricula that stress more indigenous modes of logical engagement in an African worldview and identity; emphasising the goals of quantitative literacy and symbolic reasoning. This means that successful courses in the disciplines of geography and environmental sciences that aim at solving weather problems could succeed by inculcating the skills of African metaphysical reasoning that rigorously and fundamentally explains geographical and spiritual components (Xulu, 2015). Such additional reasoning may not be available in Western-based scientific explanations.

² Our understanding of critical reasoning is purposefully broad. It encompasses the procedure for isolating useful information from less useful details.”³² Its role in the process of learning is often made up of eight critical divisions. These include research, interpretation, history, dialectics, foundation/commitment, doctrine/policy, system and communication. These elements are connected to the four epistemic levels of the human mind, namely self-transcendence—being attentive (empirical level), intelligent (intellectual level), reasonable (rational/critical level) and responsible (responsible). On the optimal level, the African renaissance-based philosophical mind often navigates along these elements, to make conclusions about realities. Through them, the philosophical mind can discern and grow in cognition and virtue about specific realities.

Secondly, African renaissance-based philosophy degrees or modules can profoundly shape modules in different disciplines to reflect the basic ethical values, political systems and ideals, human rights, the human good, the nature of knowledge and science, and the fundamental structure of reality within the South African socio-political and economic space (Higgs, 2016; Wolff, 2016). This includes the possibility of facilitating critical discussions in the history of the African Renaissance. It can also include a careful study of historical texts not only for the students to learn something about themselves but also about the issues and arguments raised in the African Renaissance literature in the past³.

Thirdly, the African Renaissance-based philosophy narrative's connectivity to the Western intellectual tradition is equally an important characteristic that puts it in a good position to be useful in the academic disciplines of other degree programs. While maintaining its African emphasis, African renaissance-based modules can always draw on symbolic logical reasoning (initially common within the Eurocentric intellectual tradition) to develop abstract concepts about African problems and solutions. This means it can help other degree programs build on existing thoughts and philosophy, to address contemporary African problems, albeit from an African perspective. Drawing on existing traditional theories, it can also locate the problems of other disciplines to the Western-based theories, while maintaining its African approach. By so doing, it can easily connect with contemporary university students, especially those who romanticize Western-developed paradigms.

Furthermore, the African Renaissance's emphasis on critical thinking and analytic reasoning is also very significant. As an offshoot of general philosophy, it can draw from established Western logical approaches to evaluate the validity and reliability of the experimental findings and hypotheses within other disciplines. Incorporated into a chemical or biology experiment module, it can help the students to critically assess the methodology used, the validity of the data collected, and the interpretations made from the data. Without strong critical thinking and logical analytic skills, students may accept flawed methodologies or misinterpret data, leading to inaccurate conclusions that hinder scientific progress. Natural scientific truths are after all built on logical reasoning (American Philosophical Association, 2007/2008).

On a more general level, critical thinking and analytic reasoning can serve as indispensable assets in intellectual discourse and for problem-solving across other disciplines. It can help

³ Since the history of African renaissance is virtually the history of African man's intellectual heritage, it is hard to ignore inclusion of the African thoughts and struggles in the contemporary ways of acquiring knowledge.

individuals break down problems and provide solutions for existential challenges. When imbibed, it can empower students to question assumptions, scrutinise purported truths, challenge entrenched norms, and foster innovative approaches. Using critical thinking students can also enhance a deeper understanding of existential issues, as well as empower individuals to dissect complex issues, discern underlying patterns, and develop nuanced perspectives, that ultimately lead to the creation of novel solutions tailored for addressing real-world challenges within various fields. In light of the dearth of white-collar jobs, and the dawn of the age of self-creation for example, the objective analysis of facts to form a judgment can be a very important assertion provided by critical thinking and logical reasoning learned through the African renaissance-based philosophy approach.

4. Philosophising and University Education

To further appreciate the value of African Renaissance-based philosophy in university degree education in South Africa it is important to ask more fundamental questions about university education such as:

- a) Has education any enduring values beyond pecuniary gains or opening up opportunities for ‘a good job’?
- b) What is the essence of education in human society?

These kinds of questions help us reflect on the meaning of education beyond immediate utilitarian gains in human society. Answering the questions makes it easier for the scholar to appreciate the value of an African renaissance-oriented philosophy approach in the university education curriculum. We start answering the question by reflecting on the true meaning of ‘education.’

Etymologically, the term “education” is derived from three main Latin words: *educio*, *educare*, and *educatum*. The first term *E-duco* is from two component words: *e* or *ex* which means “out” and *duco*, which means “to lead”. In this sense, ‘*Educo*’ means “to lead out”, “to draw out”, and “to bring forth.” Based on this, education could be assumed to mean ways of drawing out the innate potentialities in a person through the assistance of a teacher. It is an “activity that involves the interaction of educators and those receiving education” (Makhmudjonova, 2024, p. 88). Similarly, the second and third terms, ‘*educare*’ and ‘*educatum*’ connote ideas such as “to bring up, to raise, to train, to mold and to nourish” (Makhmudjonova, 2024). In line with these, education entails bringing up or raising someone through training, molding of one’s character, and nourishing of their mind (or by extension, shaping one’s personality), through

teaching or other means. This is our starting point in the understanding of the true meaning of education in South Africa.

Drawing on the above conceptualisation of education, education for us should encompass a totality of training and human upbringing. It should be a continuous shaping of the human mind and behaviour of the individual within their society. A true meaning of education should include what we regard ‘philosophising’-an understanding that *inter alia* accommodates the sharpening of one’s capacities and potentialities. It should also accommodate the idea of being mentally nourished, reshaped, refined, and having a fair understanding of the holistic picture of reality, as well as the ability to enjoy the development of intellectual freedom. This means to be educated, the individuals have to be liberated from *doxa*. This includes knowing when to recognise truth, when to question it, and when to navigate him/her ways around it.

Following the above conception of education, it is fair to argue that the new African Renaissance-based philosophical approach in the discipline of philosophy offers the truest path of helping students to be ‘educated’ in the context of South African university education since it provides a system for holistic training or formation of the human’s systematic intellectual engagement. By its investigation of the facts of experience of the African individual and deductions of reasons or pursuit of knowledge at the highest level of abstract theorisations of the individual, it can impact the mental and intellectual endowment of the African student. It can impact not only the individuals’ faculties but also their attitudes to education.

While other academic disciplines could provide information on how to deal with specific problems, African renaissance-based philosophy modules can provide learning and teaching tools for an all-round impact. It can essentially provide a bridge-building mechanism; the kind of social fabric needed to create shared social perspective, moderate social tension, train the mind, respect empirical knowledge, admire reason, subscribe to superior argument, choose competence over sentiments of any sort that make an ennobling society (Wolff, 2016).

Admittedly, we live in a society with excessive cravings and economic solution-based education, which makes it easier to look away from philosophy and be attracted by *doxa* or popular opinion (as presented to the public through the activities of sensationalised pop media), these attractions should however not make us compromise the value of getting “true education” in the university education context. Society should not be carried away to reduce the value of education to only skill acquisition, which does not justify its essence in human society. Education as William Deresiewicz (2014) wisely reminds us, is never supposed to be an elitist

measure of success that culminates in the award of a certificate and the realization of high job offers, but rather the shaping of a whole human being in his/her society.

Even the very idea of university education itself in the Western tradition was arguably built on the idea of true education and philosophising (Brown & Luzmore, 2021; Judson, 2019; Rahmawati et al., 2023). Plato, who founded the first university-like institution in ancient Greece (the Academy of Athens), in the early 4th century BCE, around 387 BCE envisioned a pioneering institution, where students would gather, in pursuit of intellectual pursuits (philosophising) (Rahmawati et al., 2023). The Academy of Athens, which was located just outside the city walls of Athens served only mainly as a gathering place for scholars and philosophers. It provided a structured environment for the study of various subjects, including philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and other sciences. The curriculum at the Academy focused on intellectual inquiry, dialectical discussions, and the pursuit of knowledge (Brown & Luzmore, 2021). Emphasis on philosophising, critical thinking, questioning, and philosophical debates, which arguably contributed significantly to the development of Western society, was the idea upon which the institution was built.

As the most important citadel of learning and for acquiring higher education in South Africa, university education curricula in South Africa should remain an important place for philosophising and advancing knowledge that can help in the development of South African society (Kugara & Mdhluli, 2023). Just like in the Academy of Athens, it should be meant to fundamentally expose students to the process of philosophising (becoming educated). It is not supposed to be merely a place for acquiring knowledge of facts for merely employment purposes. If education is inspired by the vision of ‘the better kind of life to be led’ (to be a philosopher), then consciously guided, philosophising has to be at the center of university education.

Furthermore, it is fair to also argue that if education is to be other than idle and unverifiable speculation, it must be animated by the conviction that its theory of experience is a hypothesis that is realised only as experience is shaped by it. This realisation demands that man’s dispositions be made such as to desire and strive for that kind of experience. The shaping of dispositions might take place in various institutions, but in modern societies, the university is the most crucial place, and as such it remains an indispensable arena for the shaping of ideas into a ‘living fact. This is accomplished through the inclusion of a philosophy approach in the curricula development of degree programs in university education (Kugara & Mdhluli, 2023).

The danger of not including philosophy into the curricula development of university degree programs is that, as Joseph Ratzinger (1995, p.32) notes, exposes society to the danger of having “a system which manufactures smart, talented and equally anxious and timid students, with little intellectual curiosity and a stunted sense of purpose.” Such a system does not do justice to the portrait of education. Alternatively, the inclusion of philosophy into the curricula of other disciplines in the university education as Peter Ustinov (1977) observes among other things, exposes the individual to philosophical inquisitiveness. This is the foundation for understanding the truths in the student’s own disciplines.

Philosophy education should be more than merely a dispenser of occupational and social credentials. It should also be more than a provider of a passport to privilege or of the necessary currency for attaining a secure job and a proper marriage. If college is to be worth the effort, the time, and the financial cost, it must lay open the minds and souls of its students to the wondrous possibilities of growth. It must also till the soil of being, so that the lessons of a lifetime fall not on barren rock but on places where they may take root and thrive.

The university education must prepare students to continue to learn for the rest of their lives, and most especially at those unguarded and surprising times when they may not be aware that they are learning at all."Isaac Ukpokolo and Omotade Adegbindin(2016. p.7) couldn’t have put it better when they explained thus:

“University education is the dialectical, dialogue-based system by which a society articulates and transmits its values to men and women. Education according to this vision transcends the cold and taciturn teacher-student pedagogy which focuses and aims at the attainment of certain grades, certificates, and scholarships, because of eventually clinching great employment offers.”

This does not imply that developing some particular mental skills of any individual discipline or field such as “how to solve an equation, how to construct a building, or how to analyse a text” is wrong. Not at all. What this means is that the first thing a university education should stand for is the teaching of the individual the basic skill of critical thinking; critical reasoning as humans around their environment and their identities; and the employment of the mind in solving human problems. In other words, university degree programs should help individuals develop the skills to think critically and rationally when faced with complex problems. It should also essentially entail nurturing the habit of skepticism, imbibing the capacity to put it into practice, and learning not to take ‘facts’ for granted, so that one can reach critical conclusions.

Ultimately, African Renaissance-oriented philosophy can help South African students reach their intellectual potentials. In philosophising, they can become more disposed to think, relate, assimilate, organise, initiate, manage, lead, govern, and indeed properly use their faculties as human beings within the South African society. South African students who dedicatedly incorporate African renaissance-based philosophy in their Arts, Social Science, Engineering, Natural Science, and Medical degree programs fundamentally will ultimately keep their eyes and ears open to the true value of university education.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to demonstrate the value of philosophy, especially the African renaissance-based philosophy approach in the university education enterprise. Drawing from the definitions of philosophy in general, and the ideal understanding of education, it makes a case for the inclusion of an African renaissance-based philosophy approach in the curriculum formation of current degree programs in South African universities.

The justification for the above thesis was based on two main arguments. Firstly, African renaissance-based modules can provide students with not necessarily the “know-how and the “know-what” of things, but the insight and habit of inner appropriation of the values associated with the “know-why” of their subjects. Even though the epistemological questions, the “know how” and the “know what” are all part and parcel of the solutions to existential problems, they often do not provide the justifications for scholarship. The “know why” on the other hand does. At its base sits philosophy, which can provide students with the motivation to understand ‘why’ it is necessary to study their subjects, as well as the authentic value that ought to be associated to knowledge from their subjects in the South African society. It can also drill the student into the anthropological objectives and ultimate values of what they need and ought to know within their discipline of study. In almost every estimation, as demonstrated, incorporating African renaissance-based philosophy (either in the form of adopting its approach or incorporating some of its modules into the degree programs of such disciplines) can provide capacity, in terms of best preparations and development of the students’ overall goal of study for university degree programs. The critical thinking engagement, which African renaissance philosophy approach provides can help students in all disciplines to truly understand the essence of the skills acquired within their own disciplines of study. It is in line with this understanding of the value of philosophy that it is difficult to talk about the great achievements in other disciplines

(including in science and technology) without reference to philosophy. Philosophy provides the cultivation and transmission of values, virtues and the 'good order' that sustain the essence and existentiality of engaging in scientific enquiries. The quality of philosophical engagement included in the curricula of such disciplines can have immediate impact on motivating engagement in the core subjects of such disciplines.

Secondly, Philosophy is at the core of university education. This argument here is drawn from both a philosophical concept of 'education' in particular and "university education" in general. Both from a historical and an ontological background, there is a link between university degree education and philosophy. In fact, the very essence and mandate of university education enterprise are to 'philosophise'. That is critical academic engagement and examination of knowledge for society's development. Without engaging in such enterprise, the university education in South Africa loses its core value and essence.

One way of ensuring that universities in South Africa do not abandon this mandate and that their degree programs can realise their full potential is by adopting a strategy that involves the integration and inclusion of an African renaissance-based philosophy approach and critical thinking-based modules in the curricula development of various disciplines across the academic landscape. This means including the African Renaissance philosophy-oriented approach in the formation of curricula of other disciplines, including science and technology. It can also include designing similar modules as compulsory within the curricula of such degree programs. Despite not having a theoretical base that necessarily fits into the modern mode of particularities and professionalism of the South African 21st-century job market, such will help universities cultivate a cohort of "well-educated and critically minded students", who possess the capacity to contribute meaningfully to their disciplines and South Africa's socio-economic advancement. By embracing an African renaissance philosophy-based approach in their academic curriculum, university students can also acquire true knowledge of their disciplines, as well as develop analytical skills that help them navigate multifaceted challenges prevalent in South African societies. They can also develop epistemological and ethical principles that foster positive social norms, preserve societal order, and nurture new cultural and ethical values about South African society. Moreover, this exposure to African philosophy-based critical thinking can also predispose students to engage effectively in the discernment of issues about civic responsibility, personal authenticity, and community engagement (American Philosophical Association (2007/2008)). With such dispositions, they are better positioned to

make astute decisions that are founded on reasoned deliberation about their study and about their environments.

Implicitly, it is not necessarily correct to conceptualise the South African university degree education as a “mere skill or credential to get employment.” It is equally not necessarily correct to see university education as just a process of conforming to the common-place standards of excellence, which is most typically calibrated in units of grades, scores, and scholarships - being mere accolades and recognitions which the society celebrates, while the very essence of education itself is given little or no attention. Such perception and appraisal of education as William Deresiewicz rightly explains, (referring it to as credentialism), constitutes a certain reduction of the worth of the human person to academic certification. It is also simply “a narrow practicality that is capable of understanding education only in terms of immediate utility, and that marches, at some educational institution under the banner of economics.”

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