



Reviewing the Curriculum of African Literature in Our Universities: A Case for Literature in Indigenous Languages

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ABSTRACT

A number of African literature scholars including Emenyonu (2006) Nnolim (2006) and Hale (2006) made cases for a radical change of focus of African Literature of the 21st century. While Emenyonu advocated for a new direction in the millennium that will challenge the writers, readers, teachers, and publishers of African literature to invest their best initiatives in harnessing the 20th century legacies of African literature towards a consolidated base for the 21st century, Nnolim advocated that the African writers/scholars in this century must be challenged to envision a new Africa which has achieved parity (politically, technologically, economically, and militarily with Europe and America. He has to widen his canvas. However, all their recommendations fell short of a complete and holistic re-focusing of the objectives of African literary studies in the 21st century, as it did not incorporate a deliberate attempt at recognizing literature in indigenous African languages as key elements not only in African literature, criticism and analysis but also in the curriculum for its teaching in our universities. Proving that literature in African languages, be it prose as in Ofomata's *Ihe Ojoo Gbaa Afo* (Iwuchukwu, 2006) or drama as in A.B Chukuezi's *Udo Ka Mma* (Ikeokwu, 2005) or poetry all like such works in the imperialist languages, English, French, Portuguese. Etc. mirrors the society, presenting its ills and problems with the intent of reforming by proffering solutions. Some of those authors using the vernacular see, hear, feel, go or sense what others using the colonial languages cannot see, hear, feel, go or sense. The paper wonders why such works as stated above and many others not stated as well as the vital messages conveyed, should be left unexplored nor insight about them not form part of the knowledge an African literature student should acquire. The paper further makes case for the review of the African literature curriculum content to accommodate courses that will expose the students to some details about literature in African languages. It argues that the continued exclusion of this component of the curriculum remains a subtle emasculation of the African-ness in African literature which suggests a lack of the literary will required to anchor the 21st century African literature on a radically different pedestal from those of the previous centuries.

INTRODUCTION

Every graduate in any academic discipline is always a product of the curriculum that made him and nothing more. Just as the saying goes that the servant cannot be above the master, it takes extra-ordinary circumstances and situations for one to be greater (know more) than the curriculum he went through. A thoroughly bred scholar is usually a product of a thoroughly bred curriculum. It may not be unconnected with this fact that the Federal Government through the National Universities Commission has called for a general review of the curriculum of most academic programmes in our universities to be in line with global realities. They realize albeit late that the existing curricular that produced graduates of various disciplines in the 19th and 20th centuries cannot and is not meeting the needs of graduates of the 21st century. They see a need to review, update and expand the existing curricular in line with the current globalized world, information and communication technology and graduate entrepreneurship skills. It is discovered that graduates of the 21st century are handicapped, ill-equipped to face the present realities because the curricular they went through in their various disciplines was not tailored to prepare them for these challenges. As soon as the curricular are re-designed, reviewed or expanded to accommodate the present realities, graduates of such curricular will have little or no problem confronting these challenges head on.

The above is only a foreground to re-iterate the centrality of an effective curriculum in the pursuit of a sound academic enterprise. Our focus here is on African literature. The implication of what is said above is that the need to review and update the present curriculum content of African literature taught in our universities cannot be over emphasized. The obvious inadequacies of the present curriculum can only guarantee the production of 21st century African literature graduates with 19th and 20th century African literature mindsets. The previous centuries mindsets of African scholars are explained by Hale (2006:15) in this way,

“Africans have been writing all kinds of texts for 5,000 years. Although we still have much to learn about writing in general and literature in particular during this long period, it is essential to convey to students from outset some sense of the diversity and chronology for both historical reasons as well as to erase the pervasive belief that Europe was the only source of writing in Africa. To reach this goal, we need to view the continent in its entirety”.

The opinion of Hale shared by this writer is that students of African literature should be exposed, (early enough) to the sense of the diversity of African literature. He traces these literature in African languages from those in ancient Egyptian writing to the present, those of Nubian languages which some adopted from hieroglyphics (Hale, 2006:13), those of the Ethiopians, Algerians, Berber language to those of Swahili in east African and Hausa in West Africa. Literatures in Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, Ibibio languages, both ancient and modern, etc, are part of these diversities that students of African

literature must be exposed to according to Hale who himself had to take courses in Egyptian Hieroglyphics with Donald Redford at Penn State, which enabled him to have a broader view and insight into Egyptian literature in particular, and African literature in general. It is noted however, that this insight and broader view expedient for students of African literature as postulated by Hale will continue to elude them as long as it is not accommodated and made part of the curriculum that they go through. This therefore, justifies the need for the present African literature curriculum in our Universities to be reviewed and expanded.

African Literature: Present Curriculum Content

African literature for now has not become a distinct or full fledges academic discipline in most universities, especially at the undergraduate level. There is hardly any university that offers a BA degree program in African literature only. What is available is a BA in English and Literary Studies. This means that African literature is part of a general course on literature. Other aspects of literature which is taught include oral literature, English literature, Caribbean literature, European Renaissance literature, Afro-American literature, etc. while some universities in Nigeria for example have degree programme B.A literature, others such as the University of Calabar, combine language and literature (Literary Studies) for a BA programme.

African literature has the potential to be developed into a full academic discipline of its own, but this tend to be hindered by the limited course content and non-inclusion of highly relevant aspects of the course such as literature in African languages viewed from a diachronic perspective. We are therefore looking at the curriculum specifications or provisions in the teaching of African literature as one of the courses taught to satisfy the requirement for the BA English and literary studies, using the University of Calabar as a reference University. Listed below in a table are a number of courses with direct bearing on African literature taught to four year BA programme students of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar. The source is the undergraduate programme students handbook (2004/2005).

Year	Semester	Course code	Course title
1	1 st	-	-
1	2 nd	-	-
2	1 st	ELS 2011	African Prose
2	2 ND	ELS 2012	African Poetry
3	1 st	ELS 3011	The African Novel
3	2 nd	ELS 3022	African Drama
3	2 nd	ELS3032	Nigeria Literature
4	1 st	-	-
4	2 nd	ELS 4012	Criticism of African Lierature
		ELS4051	South African Litterrure
		ELS4151	East African Literature
Option Courses		ELS 4251	North African Literature

Deficiencies of the Current Curriculum

It is interesting to observe from the table above that African literature understandably had more mention or courses than other literatures. It is however regrettable that no singular course out of all courses stressing on African literature is devoted to capturing the African literature in African languages notwithstanding the salient messages conveyed by this aspect of African literature. The above curriculum outlay pre-supposes that African literature is only literature written by Africans with imperialist languages as well as what Hale (2006) earlier pointed out which has been stressed in this work that African scholars need to erase the belief that “Europe was the only source of writing in Africa”. The entire genres of literature represented in African languages are ignored in this curriculum. This implies that products of this curriculum cannot identify, let alone appreciate any piece of work in African literature done in any African language. This curriculum suggest further that all such literature in African languages are junk writings without meaningful scholastic articulations that they do not deserve to be mentioned or their content explored. It implies that the definition of African literature to include literature in African languages is a mere cosmetic exercise done to pacify the minds of endoglosic scholars. Another deficiency of this curriculum is that some of the courses that would have given a diachronic image to the curriculum and the study are classified as option courses which the student may not eventually take till they graduate. It should not be optional for African literature students to know such other regional literatures like South African literature, East African literature, and North African literature even though such literatures are still those of the foreign languages. The argument may be the unavailability of space in the context of a combined B.A in English and Literary studies. A separate degree programme B.A in Literary studies tends therefore to be apparently inevitable if such lofty suggestions and expansions are to be accommodated. It can be imagined how insightful, educative and what creative images of Africa shall be uncovered by exploring additionally regional literatures in the languages of those regions, e.g Swahili, etc.

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There is the need to correct the observed lapses in the above curriculum and expand it to address the issues raised. It is hereby proposed for inclusion in the curriculum of African literature studies, courses that will not only introduce the students to the available works of literature in African languages but also those that will expose them to some details to be able to grasp the creative imagination, aesthetics, thematic relevance and criticism of extant and contemporary African affairs by those works of art in vernacular. Below are some of such proposals. We have decided to use an imaginary

code number such as 333to represent any approved course code that any department may wish to use.

Recommended Courses: Literature in African Languages
Course Code

ELS 333	Survey of Literature in African Languages
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Course Description:

This course is aimed at introducing to the students as many numbers of available texts in literature in African languages as possible, particular highlights will be made of the available texts in the language of the community or town where the university is domiciled. This survey will include or covers the three genres of literature, Drama, Prose and poetry.

Course Code	Title
ELS/XBY	Appreciating prose in african language
ELS/XBY	Appreciating drama in african language
ELS/XBY	Appreciating poetry in african language

Course Description: In any of the three courses; appreciating prose, drama or poetry in African languages, an attempt is made to appreciate one or two works in any African language especially the language of the community or town where the university is located or the language of the state or region if the community or town's language is not yet written or have no literature materials.

The challenge posed by language in this proposal is acknowledged. They can be handled in any of these two ways. Firstly, African literature scholars from the areas of the university's location will require a little brushing by way of few days seminars or workshops from African languages scholars either from within the university or outside the university to be able to appreciate literary piece in their own languages. In presenting his Ahajioku lecture, Obiechina (1994:29), a world renowned literary scholar showed a mastery of African literature. He competently x-rayed African literary works in colonial languages as well as those in African languages. His incisive analysis of classical Igbo literary pieces like Belgam's Ije Odumodu Jere and Omenuko by Pita Nwana led him to come up with such findings that "the journey is used by Igbo writers as a mode for character exploration or for the testing out of moral positions".

Another way to resolve the language challenge is by auditing these courses from sister departments in the institution such as Department of Linguistics and Indigenous African languages. That explains why we have used the course codes ELS/XBY where ELS is, English and Literary studies code while XBY could be the taken from another department. Current globalization trends encourage inter-disciplinary research rather than isolated research.

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For the students, once a curriculum is designed and presented to them, they will adjust themselves to take and pass every course that is relevant to their success. In fact, they will appreciate a balanced African literature programme that will not only expand their knowledge but also their employment opportunities. If English Language is identified with English Literature or Literature in English, African literature must identify with African languages.

Implications and Potentials of a New Curriculum

Scholars of African literature agree that though there was some degree of success recorded in terms of projecting African image as well as in changing the erroneous view of Europe on Africa, nevertheless, there remains the need to change the focus of African literature in the 21st century from that of the 19th and 20th centuries. Emenyeonu (2006:Xiii) advocated for a new direction in the millennium that will challenge the writers, readers, teachers, and publishers of African literature to invest their best initiatives in harnessing the 20th century legacies of African literature towards a consolidated base for the 21st century. Nnolim (2006:9) called for the African writers and critics of the 21st to envision a new Africa, which has achieved parity (Politically, technologically, economically and military) with Europe and America. According to him, the African writer has to “Widen his canvas”.

It is noted that while these scholars made cases for a radical change of focus of African literature of the 21st century, their recommendations fell short of a complete and holistic refocusing of African literary studies as it did not incorporate a deliberate attempt at recognizing literature in indigenous African languages as key element not only in African literary criticism and analysis but also in the curriculum for its teaching in our universities. Some pertinent questions are raised based on these recommendations. Is it possible to consolidate 21st century African literature base with the continued systematic exclusion of literature in African languages, their writers, criticisms, analysis and teaching as not being part of African literature? Bernth lindfors (2006:109) charts of writers of Anglophone African literature and their literary status from 1976-1999, identified about twenty (20) outstanding writers whom he ranked according to their status. No writer of any of African literature in African language made the list. Not just that they did not fall within the ranking, there is no doubt that if he makes a list of all Anglophone African literature writers, he knows or recognizes, it will not still include African literature writers in African languages. We have decided to include a number of such writers here side by side his list.

Poetry

No	Name of text	Author	Year of Publication
1.	Nka Okwu This speech art	J. C. Maduekwe	1979
2.	Echieche Poems (thoughts)	R. Ezeuko and J Anowai	1989
3.	Nkemakolam	Nolue Emenanjo	N.D
4.	Aare-Ago	Lawuyi Oguniran	1977

List of Some Anglophone African Literature Writers and Their Ranking as At 1999 According To Bernth Lindfors (2006:117).

1.	Soyinka	940
2.	Achebe	810
3.	Ngugi	498
4.	Head	277
5.	Armah	223
6.	Emecheta	168
7.	Saro-wiwa	119
8.	Nwapa	118
9.	Farah	117
10.	Aidoo	114
11.	Osofisan	108
12.	La Guma	105
13.	Clark	98
13.	Tutuola	98
15.	Marechera	91
16.	Osundare	86
17.	Dangaremba	81
18.	Okri	80
19.	Plaatje	78
20.	Okot	73
21.	Equaino	72
23.	Abrahams	72
24.	Ekwensi	63
25.	Okara	59
25.	Okigbo	
27.	Amadi	55
28.	Brutus	54

A List Of Literature In African Languages And Their Authors

S/N	Name Of Text	Author	Year Of Publication
1.	Ukwa Ruo Oge Yaa Daa	Tony Ubesie	
	When The Breadfruit Is Ripe, It Will Fall.		
2.	The Ojoo Gbaa Afo...	Chinedum	1999
	When Evil Last For Years...	Ofomata	
3.	Aka Ji Aku	Tagboo Nzeako	N.D
	The Wealthy Hand		
4.	Ufoknwed Uwen Edim	M.T. Udonkwak	
	School On A Rainy Day		
5.	Tita Nkakad	E.E. John	
6.	Edikot Nwed 1-5	E.N. Amaku	

Drama

NO	Name of Text	Author	Year of Publication
1.	Ajo Obi	G.I. Nwozuzu	1998
	Bad mind		
2.	Uwa Ka Mma Na Nro	Inno Nwadike	1999
	Life is. Better in the dream world		
3.	Ako Bu Ndu	Anaelechi B. Chukuezi	1988
	Wisdom is life		
4.	Eegun Alare	Lawuyi Oguniran	1972
5.	Idip Akpan Adiana	Uwemedimo Iwoetok	
6.	Mutanda Oyom Namondo	E.N. Amaku	
7.	Mfon	Sunny Sampson Akpan	

Africans may be deceived by Lindfor's subtle categorization of who African literature writers are, but those who influence such categorizations will continue to cast aspersions on African literature viewed exclusively as literature in languages that Africans lack native competence in which is in contrast with their own literature. The major focus of Nnolim's recommendations for 21st century is the African writer and critic which tend

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not to include the writers in African languages. If not, why does he want them to envision parity with Europe and America militarily? Why should African writers not envision linguistic parity in the 21st century? Admittedly, African writers cannot envision a linguistic parity given their current perceptions of literature in African languages and its neglect in African literature teaching curriculum in the universities.

Evidences abound proving that literature in African languages is not lacking in thematic content nor stylistic pungency compared with those in foreign language. Iwuchukwu (2006) using Ofomata's *Ihe Ojoo Gbaa Afo* showed how a prose in African language can be used to expose societal vices, the crises that arise as a result of linguistic and cultural convergence as well as commentary on the brain drain syndrome in Africa. Ikeokwu (2005:4) used A. b. Chukuezi's plays (Drama in African language), to portray self-image as an integral part of man which tends to manifest selfishness (egoism) more as opposed to selflessness (altruism). Most African plays that exist reflect a serious or comic tone, or a combination of the two and these characteristics traverse the three genres of drama; tragedy, comedy, and tragic-comedy. They have themes that centre on folklore, satire, revenge, vaulting ambition, greed, corruption, morality or didacticism etc. Ikeokwu maintained that Chukuezi through his plays has a penchant for gender equity and believe that though we are in a particular world, modernization or education should equip the male folks with skills and attitude of accommodating women, especially in issues they are stakeholders.

It is pertinent to pause a while and ponder if such contemporary issues and themes raised by these literature in African languages differs significantly from those written by other Africans in foreign languages? Should such works as stated above and many others not stated as well as the vital messages conveyed, be left unexplored nor insight about them not form part of the knowledge an African literature student should acquire? This justifies the case for the inclusion of literature in African languages as part of the curriculum for the teaching of African literature in our universities. Such a curriculum has the potential of producing well balanced literary scholars, writers or critics that will envision a new African in the 21st century which has achieved linguistic parity with Europe and America. It will convey some sense of the diversity of African literature to the students. A look at any caption of any piece of literature in African languages is already, a journey into proverbs, riddles, idioms, and other cultural expressions of Africa.

CONCLUSION

We examined the strategic role a comprehensive and balanced curriculum in the calibre of graduates produced from our university system. It has been shown also that the present curriculum used in teaching students of African literature is deficient in content as it makes no provision for knowing or teaching those literatures in African languages. These deficiency manifests in

the graduates of such curriculum who subtly exclude literature in African languages as part of African literature since they cannot analyze, or teach it. Literature in African languages tends to attract more honour and respect to African literature than when it is exclusively in foreign languages. It projects Africa on a linguistic parity with Europe and America. Suggestion is made to review the present curriculum to include the teaching of literature in African languages as part of teaching of African literature. It is submitted that the continued exclusion of this component of the curriculum is a subtle emasculation of the African-ness in African literature. This suggest a lack of the literary will required to anchor the 21st century African literature on a radically different pedestal from those of the previous centuries.

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