

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF HIGHER  
EDUCATION CURRICULUM EVALUATION IN AFRICA:  
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## ABSTRACT

Despite the importance of the curriculum to societal development and well-being, very little attention has been given to curriculum evaluation vis-a-vis the strategies and impact on the African society/higher education system. Being a qualitative ethnographic study, this study explored the reflections of four higher education academics on the essence of and impact of curriculum evaluation on the African society, as well as the strategies for higher education curriculum evaluation. The study is collaborative autoethnographic research. The purposive sampling technique was used to select four experienced academics from higher education institutions in Nigeria and South Africa. The researchers were the data collection tools. Results were reflectively and critically analyzed and collated using a dedicated WhatsApp platform. Verbatim reporting was utilized to report the study's findings. Findings reveal that evaluating the higher education curriculum avails of it with the expectation of what a curriculum should be, as well as meeting global standards, competitiveness, and societal needs; curriculum evaluation does necessitate positive transformation on the general standard of education; and strategies for its evaluation are diverse and context oriented. For a higher education curriculum to meet the expectations of the 21st century, its evaluation should be regularly and collectively carried out by education players and actors. The challenges impeding effective and regular evaluation of the higher education curriculum in Africa should be urgently addressed.

**Keywords:** Autoethnography; Curriculum evaluation; Higher Education.

*Uma exploração auto-etnográfica da avaliação curricular do ensino superior em África: implicações para o sistema educativo*

## RESUMO

Apesar da importância do currículo para o desenvolvimento e o bem-estar social, tem sido dada muito pouca atenção à sua avaliação em relação às estratégias e ao impacto na sociedade e no sistema de ensino superior africanos. Este estudo etnográfico qualitativo explorou as reflexões de quatro académicos do ensino superior sobre a essência e o impacto da avaliação curricular na sociedade e no sistema educativo africanos, bem como as estratégias para essa avaliação. Trata-se de uma investigação auto-etnográfica colaborativa. Utilizou-se a técnica de amostragem intencional para selecionar quatro académicos com experiência em instituições de ensino superior da Nigéria e da África do Sul. Os investigadores foram a ferramenta de recolha de dados. Os resultados foram analisados e compilados de forma reflexiva e crítica através de uma plataforma específica do WhatsApp. Foram utilizadas atas literais para comunicar as conclusões do estudo. As conclusões revelam que a avaliação do currículo do ensino superior lhe confere as expectativas do que deveria ser, além de cumprir os padrões globais, a competitividade e as necessidades sociais; a avaliação curricular requer uma transformação positiva no nível geral de educação. As estratégias para a sua avaliação

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são diversas e adaptam-se ao contexto. Para que um currículo do ensino superior cumpra as expectativas do século XXI, a sua avaliação deve ser realizada de forma regular e coletiva pelos atores educacionais. É urgente abordar os desafios que impedem uma avaliação eficaz e regular do currículo do ensino superior em África.

**Palavras-chave:** Auto-etnografia; Avaliação curricular; Ensino Superior.

*Una exploración auto-etnográfica de la evaluación curricular de la educación superior en África: implicaciones para el sistema educativo*

## RESUMEN

A pesar de la importancia del currículo para el desarrollo y el bienestar social, se ha prestado muy poca atención a su evaluación en relación con las estrategias y el impacto en la sociedad y el sistema de educación superior africanos. Este estudio etnográfico cualitativo exploró las reflexiones de cuatro académicos de educación superior sobre la esencia y el impacto de la evaluación curricular en la sociedad y el sistema educativo africanos, así como las estrategias para dicha evaluación. Se trata de una investigación auto-etnográfica colaborativa. Se empleó la técnica de muestreo intencional para seleccionar a cuatro académicos con experiencia de instituciones de educación superior de Nigeria y Sudáfrica. Los investigadores fueron la herramienta de recopilación de datos. Los resultados se analizaron y recopilamos de forma reflexiva y crítica mediante una plataforma específica de WhatsApp. Se utilizaron actas literales para comunicar los hallazgos del estudio. Los hallazgos revelan que la evaluación del currículo de educación superior lo dota de las expectativas de lo que debería ser, además de cumplir con los estándares globales, la competitividad y las necesidades sociales; la evaluación curricular requiere una transformación positiva en el nivel general de educación. Las estrategias para su evaluación son diversas y se adaptan al contexto. Para que un currículo de educación superior cumpla con las expectativas del siglo XXI, su evaluación debe ser realizada de forma regular y colectiva por los actores educativos. Es urgente abordar los desafíos que impiden una evaluación eficaz y regular del currículo de educación superior en África.

**Palabras clave:** Auto-etnografía; Evaluación curricular; Educación Superior.

## Introduction

The curriculum is essential for addressing the Africa 2063 Agenda goals to transform the African continent through social and economic development. Particularly, one of the goals stipulates that “Africa’s human capital will be fully developed as its most precious resource, through sustained investments based on universal early childhood development and basic education, and sustained investments in higher education, science, technology, research and innovation, and the elimination of gender disparities at all levels of education”. Essentially, further attention needs to be paid to the higher education curriculum for increased access, expansion, and strength to postgraduate education, to ensure world-class infrastructure for learning and research, and to support scientific reforms that underpin the transformation of the African continent. One way of ensuring and promoting effective and quality teaching and learning outcomes in an educational institution is through the curriculum. Since the teaching and learning processes are not static, the curriculum needs to be evaluated for responsiveness, quality, relevance, and adequacy. Given that societal and organizational demands have changed, educational curricula from earlier industrial revolutions might not be applicable in this Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) era (Fomunyan, 2022; Osiesi et al., 2024a). As such, the role of curriculum evaluation for and within the educational and societal context cannot be overemphasised. This reflective paper, therefore, provides insight into the essence, impacts, and strategies for evaluating the higher education curriculum.

Defining the curriculum is somewhat ambiguous and controversial (O’Connor, 2023). Blignaut (2021) posits that the curriculum is an instrument of education for social change that enables students to become critical travelers through the world. According to Essays (2018), through the curriculum, people learn about the world, develop morals and attitudes toward life, receive training to become experts in a subject and stabilize their physical and mental health. According to O’Connor (2022; 2023), the curriculum is a sophisticated social practice that encapsulates educational values, including what is intended and what is done and experienced, as well as the kinds of future opportunities created and made possible.

A curriculum is deliberately planned for instruction in schools and supervised by the school and government authorities to ensure the effective transmission of the planned experiences, skills, and

knowledge to students (Anderson et al., 2020; Osiesi & Blignaut, 2025). A curriculum can also be defined as a set of possible experiences planned in a school to discipline students' thoughts and behavior patterns (Fomunyan, 2014). Still, Yates (2006) posits that defining the curriculum goes beyond the institutional settings, as it also caters to daily practicalities and politics. The concept of curriculum includes the choice of knowledge and content, curriculum practices such as creating curriculum and document frameworks, pedagogical approaches, tasks for evaluation and assessment, teaching organization, and the creation of infrastructure and resources to support curriculum work in educational institutions (O'Connor, 2023).

A cursory glance at journals both inside Africa and internationally (e.g., the Australian Journal of Curriculum Perspectives) recently attests to the search for appropriate and meaningful curriculum transformation cum evaluation in Africa. In the last eight years, especially in South Africa, the search for a decolonized and African-purposed curriculum has intensified. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide has further accentuated this search for curriculum transformation in the continent, where inequalities between developed and developing nations were particularly laid bare in terms of educational technology and, recently, artificial intelligence and machine learning, amongst others. One of the main ways that higher education contributes to the development of Africa is by producing graduates who are critical enough to question the historical, political, economic, and social status quo (Agbaje, 2023). The higher education curriculum is the academic and non-academic blueprint that drives the learning activities and outcomes within the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning domains. Given that the higher education curriculum is to prepare students (undergraduates, graduates, and postgraduates) for future and functional societal living, it should then be evaluated timeously.

Evaluation now informs evidence-based African policies and stemming from global competitiveness; universities need to evaluate their curricula to meet both national and international market requirements (Tirivanhu et al., 2018). Since through it, the quality of education is improved and sustained (Sone & Oluwasuji, 2021). Osiesi (2020) and Osiesi et al. (2024b) define evaluation as gathering trustworthy information about a past, present, or completed programme, event, or activity. According to the author, evaluation necessitates making a well-informed choice about whether to continue, change, suspend, or end a programme. Evaluation provides teachers with feedback in the educational setting, enabling them to rearrange teaching and learning activities, choose fresh and effective teaching strategies, streamline or enhance learning objectives, and assess evaluation protocols and procedures (Osiesi, 2020). The traditional curriculum, which has been criticized for not being responsive to student's needs, is widely used in several African higher education institutions. Because the same course materials are taught year after year, African students are not prepared for the demands of the workplace of the future (Bleazby, 2015).

According to Baiyelo (2003), evaluation can take the form of context (background planning before curriculum design, which involves situational analysis for acceptability and feasibility, which may lead to future reforms), input (concerns the administrative structure of the curriculum, such as adequate funding, staffing, and resource outlay), process (determining value based on content, order, appropriateness, relevance, and adequacy of instruction), product (focusing on the learner and the outcomes of learning), impact (assesses the influence of the curriculum on the citizenry or the general society), and effect (assesses the influence of the curriculum on those that benefit from its contents). Curriculum evaluation, especially that of higher education, would be necessary and impactful for a feasible societal transformation and improvement.

Curriculum evaluation is a crucial step in ensuring that the educational objectives and goals are met and preserving its effectiveness, relevance, and responsiveness to students' and society's requirements and preferences. Important data and information on the learning schedules and outcomes (both expected and unexpected) are routinely gathered and examined through curriculum evaluation. The culture of inquiry, reflection, and collaboration among the populace is promoted by curriculum evaluation, supporting societal innovation, variety, and development.

According to Labastida (2016), curriculum evaluation is to determine the value of the curriculum to identify its strengths and weaknesses, yield intended and standard results, provide vital information for education stakeholders, foster its implementation, general accountability, and practice improvement. According to Ifarajimi (2023), evaluations improve the curriculum's alignment with national standards and goals, point out its strengths and weaknesses, support teacher and student professional development, and advance accountability and transparency in the educational system.

The Teacher Education Curriculum (TEC) is one such higher education program that requires evaluation (Osiesi et al., 2024a). For Africa to accomplish its development goals, ensure inclusion, and improve educational quality, TEC evaluation is essential. For the following reasons, we contend that the African TEC should be assessed:

- i. To resolve inconsistencies between theory and application: According to Nketsia and Opoku (2024), a large number of teacher education programs in Africa prioritise academic knowledge over practical abilities, leaving graduates ill-equipped to handle real-world classroom issues, particularly in inclusive education settings. It appears that the TEC does not give student teachers (and perhaps in-service teachers as well) the chance to use inclusive teaching practices and consider their experiences working with a diverse student body (Nketsia & Opoku, 2024).
- ii. Encouraging inclusive and equitable education: Teachers are frequently not given the knowledge and dispositions necessary to assist students with disabilities or those from under represented groups by current TEC. Reform is therefore required to address this shortfall.
- iii. Aligning with continental and international goals: The existing TEC has not sufficiently taken into account the lofty goals (such as SDG 4) that the African Union and the UN have set for inclusive, high-quality education by 2030 and beyond.
- iv. This gap can be closed and student achievement raised by evaluating the TEC with an emphasis on competency-based instruction and practical skills.
- v. Ensuring Relevance to Local Contexts: Evaluation can be used to tailor the TEC to local issues like big class sizes, multigrade classrooms, and scarce resources. This will guarantee that teacher preparation is sensitive to the unique requirements and conditions of African communities and schools.

To guarantee that future teachers are adequately prepared and that programs continue to be applicable, efficient, and sensitive to evolving educational demands, it is imperative that the TEC be evaluated. The complexity of teaching and learning may not be fully captured by traditional evaluation techniques, which frequently rely largely on bureaucratic procedures or inadequate feedback mechanisms. A number of appealing alternatives and methods could be used for TEC assessment. These could include stepwise and standards-based evaluation, comprehensive, multi-perspective evaluation, inquiry-based and reflective techniques, and systematic curriculum evaluation models.

Concerning curriculum perspectives, previous studies on curriculum inquiry (O'Connor, 2023; Yates, 2018), curriculum reforms (Agbaje, 2023), and curriculum responsiveness (Fomunyan, 2022; Osiesi & Blignaut, 2025) abound. Considering the diversities of these perspectives, there is a need for further alternative views, theories, research, and evaluation of the curriculum (Brennan, 2022; O'Connor, 2023). More so, Msila and Gumbo (2016), Afful-Broni et al. (2020), and Ayentimi and Burgess (2019) reaffirm that the African educational structures have been criticized continuously for not bringing about the expected changes or advancement, pushing for more investigations into the contents and potency of the curriculum for evaluation. Against this backdrop, this paper explores the authors' reflections on African higher education curriculum evaluation, its essence, impacts, strategies, and societal implications.

The following were the questions we raised:

1. Why evaluate the African higher education curriculum?



2. How would African higher education curriculum evaluation impact the society/education system?
3. What evaluation strategy (ies) can be adopted for African higher education curricula?

### **African Higher Education Curriculum**

Controversies surround the quality of higher education globally (Zuo & Wang, 2021), and this may be a function of the curricula in use. The discourse of development and the creation of graduates who are sufficiently critical to question Africa's historical, political, economic, and social status quo are fundamentally shaped by the curricula of African higher education institutions (Agbaje, 2023). Regarding curriculum, African higher education institutions were founded in an imperial culture to produce laborers who could take the place of colonial expatriates. However, these institutions are still hindered by inadequate funding and the slow adoption of important and creative policies (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). According to the author, curricula for higher education may have been hastily created out of concern that uneducated Africans would not be able to run their affairs, particularly after independence. According to Mazrui (2003, p. 44), Africa lacks the necessary ability or guts to step in and alter the curriculum and educational systems that her colonizers left behind. According to our argument, the curriculum used in African higher education institutions reflects the "African body" while also incorporating the colonial masters' voice.

These colonialists insisted that their paradigm be reflected in the curricula despite their lack of a thorough understanding of the African terrains. On the other hand, educated Africans, including teachers, who were products of the colonialist curricula, continued transmitting and transferring these curricula to other Africans and future generations (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). According to Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019), these curricula continue to advance literary education and liberal arts at the expense of technological literacy or practical and vocational training. Future attempts to remedy this perceived abnormality have not yielded many results; this is because, to date, the African higher education curricula still have some elements of "Western culture" as well as the teaching of its languages (including French, German, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese, English; to mention but a few) inherent in it (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019).

To address the various issues facing higher education on the continent, African higher education needs stakeholders' strong collaboration and partnership (Fomunyan, 2022). Institutions of higher learning in Africa still operate largely or entirely according to foreign models and curricula. Because these models and curricula are consistently adopted, graduates with imitation-focused rather than originality-focused mindsets are produced. In lieu of the positions of Mazrui (2003:65), we argue that African higher education institutions should adopt and imbibe the "African culture" but assimilate, if necessary, the "Western technology". Therefore, given that the African higher education curricula are yet to be fully "Africanised," evaluations of its elements and components become necessary.

### **Methodology**

Autoethnography (AE) has garnered increasing attention as a research method in the past few years (Maistry & Le Grange, 2023). According to Lapadat (2017), autoethnography is a type of qualitative inquiry in which a researcher shares a narrative of their own experiences—in this case, reflections—while also integrating an ethnographic examination of the cultural setting in which the experience is situated. However, we used collaborative autoethnography (CAE), in which two or more researchers pool their energy, data, and intellectual insights to produce richer datasets in place of the drawbacks of autoethnography (AE) (undue "biaseness" of the researcher/personal experience and relational ethics) (Lapadat, 2017). Through the CAE, we critically collated our personal memory data, interviewed ourselves, and analyzed our reflections (Chang et al., 2013). Purposive sampling was used to select four experienced academics from higher education institutions: a Postdoctoral Researcher Fellow and an academic in Higher education research and

Educational Evaluation (South Africa and Nigeria), a full professor of curriculum studies (South Africa), a senior academic of Higher education, pedagogy and humanizing pedagogy (South Africa), and another full professor of educational evaluation from Nigeria. The researchers were the data collection tool. Results were reflectively and critically analyzed and collated using a dedicated WhatsApp platform. Verbatim reporting was used to present the study's results, as we needed to present the results without tampering to enhance the findings' trustworthiness and dependability.

This study's data were mainly from the author's personal memories and reflections that stemmed from the questions raised in the study. At the preliminary stage, via a WhatsApp group we created, we raised and later fine-tuned these questions that our independent reflections would answer. Subsequently, we critically analyzed one another's reflections on the questions through the same WhatsApp group. As this is a collaborative reflection, we have chosen to refer to the results as "we" in this paper. To further establish the authenticity of our reflections, each of us decided to write one out on paper. To ensure relevance, the author whose perspective is elaborated is numbered according to the author listing in which it would be published.

To preserve the anonymity of students and other educated parties, the data collected for the research process was primarily concentrated on the faculty members' perspectives, experiences, and voices. The participants' opinions should not be interpreted as applicable to the whole field of higher education but rather as a reflection of their unique institutional experiences and viewpoints, which have been molded by their years of service as university academics from two African nations (Nigeria and South Africa). Furthermore, the claims made by the participants are not qualified or supported by this paper. Rather, their opinions ought to be interpreted as their perspectives on the assessment of curricula in higher education to facilitate or pave the way for additional research in this field.

## Findings

**RQ 1:** Why evaluate the higher education curriculum?

### Author 1

Evaluating the higher education curriculum has many potential benefits for the higher education sector. Substantial change may be necessary for the current curriculum, that is, if Africa desires to be well-developed and globally competitive (Fomunyan, 2022). Education stakeholders and society want to see a robust and functional education system. For instance, academics would want to be sure that the curriculum covers all contents and standards to meet their goals vis-a-vis those of the curriculum designers; parents would also want to know and guarantee that their wards receive the best education possible and being transformed through the contents of such curriculum into functional citizens; the society is not excluded, as they would want to know that their taxes are paying off through an effective education system that produces a viable and employable labour force.

Additionally, curriculum developers and education policymakers could use the outcomes of curriculum evaluation to drive improvements and innovations in education and other sectors of the economy; governments utilise the reports of curriculum evaluation as a basis for improved educational funding, social amenities provision, employment creation, planning and execution of manpower training and professional development of individuals both within and outside her workforce, and for international comparison and competitiveness; amongst others. All things considered, the goal of curriculum evaluation is to shed light on these two questions: Do the planned and structured courses, programmes, activities, and learning opportunities within the context of higher education (in this case, specifically) produce the desired results? What better ways are there to improve the graduates of higher education as the curricular products?

## Authors 2

Some African critics/academics have (legitimately) asked if we are universities in Africa or African universities. What distinguishes African universities from universities elsewhere, in the global North? However, as important as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, AI, and the preparation of graduates for the world of work is, an over-emphasis on only these things will lead to a skewed/impoverished curriculum. I believe a curriculum should always be balanced and prepare students for meaningful living. A curriculum should also infuse criticality in students to be perceptive, critical, and ethical citizens who will pursue a more just and caring society. A true curriculum must do more than prepare people for the world of work (I truly believe in this!).

An authentic and relevant curriculum should prepare citizens to be ethical human beings, citizens who ask critical questions about the human condition and who ideally want to change the world. If a curriculum only prepares people for the 4th Industrial Revolution, then such serves the neoliberal agenda in the world (and, as a result, needs to be evaluated or re-evaluated). We are more than economic beings; we are fathers/mothers, workers, community members, and spiritual beings—we are so many things simultaneously. So, to pitch us only to be useful to the economic machinery of society will be an impoverished view of who we are. But yes, of course, I agree that the curriculum should cater to all other domains. Thus, a thorough curriculum evaluation should enable the education process and its products to make ethical judgments and always to have a just, humane, and caring society in mind. It should encourage us towards human solidarity and deep human connections as was envisaged and practiced in communities driven by "Ubuntu" (I am because of you). Moreover, if you go back to this from a spiritual perspective, people understood this hundreds of years ago. By evaluating the curriculum, educated minds could travel the world with critical and diverse views.

A curriculum is always context and time-dependent; hence, it must be evaluated every 5-7 years. What is appropriate and relevant today might not be so in 5 years' time. Curriculum evaluators need to assess a curriculum periodically to determine if the outcomes or goals of the curriculum are still being achieved. If not, then change is required. One could imagine how chaotic the world could become without ethics or ethical considerations. A curriculum should be wide and not narrow. As wide as life itself. The recipients of university curricula/education will not only be workers but also parents, community members, spiritual beings, and perform many other citizen roles.

## Author 3

The curriculum must be responsive to the needs of society, and for this reason, there must be an ongoing evaluation of the curriculum. The needs of society are hardly ever constant as they move from one social, cultural, political, and economic factor to another. In other words, as society changes, the curriculum is expected to change, and this can only be done through evaluating such curriculum. This means that the purpose for which a curriculum should be evaluated is that it must be relevant to the society it is intended to serve. This purpose is often determined by consultation with various stakeholders, some of which are educationalists, civil societies, NGOs, religious organizations, labor market experts, and governments.

For me, curriculum evaluation should be contextual as much as it considers curriculum evaluation principles. Context plays an important role in any curriculum and should be an element upon which any curriculum should be evaluated. We cannot universalize our understanding of knowledge, nor should we incorporate different ways of knowing based on the era under which theories originated. For me, these are where our curriculum evaluation considerations should be drawn. I consider the curriculum a contested space, and for me, only the most important pieces of knowledge should be given priority in the curriculum.

#### Author 4

I want to begin this discussion by illuminating the meaning of curriculum at the tertiary education level. Tertiary education is an institution of higher learning. This level includes the colleges of education, polytechnics, and universities (as in Nigeria). The essence is to produce high-level manpower. Every institution of higher learning has its peculiarities, which are often reflected in its motto, mission, vision statements, and curriculum. Higher Education curricula are those planned and unplanned activities or behaviors the educational system of any nation organize for students at this level. They include all experiences students are exposed to, whether related to academic activities or extra-curricular. They may be structured or unstructured. Whatever the nature or type, such exposures usually aim to ensure that those who passed through such experiences can meet the expected outcome at this level. Therefore, the tertiary education level curriculum is tailored to meet the essence of establishing such schools. However, to attain the expected learning outcome, some standards are set.

It is important to periodically evaluate the higher education curriculum to check if it aligns with the needs and priorities of the society it serves and measure the extent to which the curriculum objectives are achieved. Evaluation of higher education curricula can help stakeholders identify what works, the level of effectiveness, and areas for improvement, which will, in turn, help the education sector realize the objectives for setting up this level of education. Because evaluation is a methodical process that critically assesses a programme, this information is made possible. Information about the activities, traits, and results of the higher education curriculum should be gathered and analysed. At this stage of education, the information gathered could be used to make well-informed decisions about what is effective and what needs to be improved.

A curriculum evaluation for higher education could help stakeholders understand the degree of success or progress made, the impact on beneficiaries and the society it serves, and other important information necessary for society's advancement, public morale, and attracting and keeping funding from current and future sources. By carrying out this kind of activity, the stakeholders could also be able to evaluate the curriculum and decide whether to keep it the same or revise it. A review like this could help instructors in higher education interpret the curriculum by connecting student performance to particular learning goals and assessing how well they are teaching. Consequently, educators can modify ineffective teaching decisions and institutionalize successful ones in their pedagogy. As they work with the students and draw from past experiences to identify the best practices to be repeated in subsequent interventions, it could also reveal what works and what does not. Additionally, a successful evaluation of the curriculum for higher education that involved gathering data from a variety of stakeholders, including parents, employers of labour, students, and school administrators, could produce accurate and trustworthy data and act as a diagnostic tool to enhance the efficiency of the curriculum's teaching-learning process as well as suggest areas for improvement and best practices.

Evaluating higher education curricula could ensure that the stakeholders involved are accountable for their actions and decisions and promote transparency in operations. Such activity could be a tool for implementers (teachers who serve as interpreters and the administration who are expected to provide the tools and financial backing) to learn from past experiences and continuously refine strategies and approaches. Also, by regularly evaluating higher education curricula, the government ensures alignment with its strategic objectives and broader development goals. It could enhance the quality of learning outcomes, while the reverse would require calling for review and interventions. Curriculum data is continuously collected to identify process strengths and weaknesses (e.g. inadequate human and material resources). This could be useful in changing goals in addition to other things. Evaluation data can enhance curriculum development by facilitating decision-making regarding curriculum content, methods suggested for teaching and learning materials and even suggested evaluation approaches. Making decisions on time guarantees that the development process moves in the correct direction right away.



Higher education curriculum evaluation can assist the education sector in analysing the progress of individual students, determining what they have learned (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and adjustment, etc.), identifying areas in which they may require assistance and the type of assistance required, determining the extent to which curriculum materials are provided, their relevance, usability, appropriateness, and affordability, evaluating the institutions' overall effectiveness, and determining how society views the curriculum.

**RQ 2:** How would higher education curriculum evaluation impact the African Society/education system?

#### **Author 1**

In lieu of the regular debates and discussions surrounding the African higher education curriculum, evaluating such a curriculum would essentially transform African education. In several African countries (e.g., South Africa), the cries for a decolonized curriculum continue to rise (Jansen, 2017; Motala et al., 2021), with some still holding the belief that the African higher education curriculum is still under the purview of the West (Rensburg, 2020). As such, one would think that evaluating the curriculum would not only be contextual but, as in the words of Motala et al. (2021), also involve its decolonization in all senses (both an epistemic and material movement). Research shows that inadequate and out-of-date curriculum content is African higher education's main problem (Fomunyam, 2022).

Curriculum evaluation can aid in identifying the advantages and disadvantages of a given curriculum while providing a means of enhancing and successfully implementing it. It is a means of tracking and evaluating how the curriculum affects the instructor and the students. A curriculum evaluation can yield important data and insights for enhancing the curriculum's structure, content, delivery, and assessment methods. Evaluation of the curriculum also improves the standard of instruction in a classroom. Curriculum evaluation is the process by which the curriculum is improved in relevance, efficacy, and responsiveness to learners' and society's needs and interests. Regular curriculum evaluations help teachers' performance, professional competence, and growth.

#### **Author 2**

All curricula and/or knowledge systems serve unique/local and universal/global interests and contexts. Although knowledge systems serve wider and universal contexts, their importance for regional and local communities cannot be underestimated. This truism is often repeated in the dictum/saying, "Act locally and think globally." African universities should become more focused on the continent rather than just being another Oxford or Harvard university in Africa. What can we learn from ancient universities like Nalanda University in India? Nalanda was revered for its relevance and service to local communities thousands of years ago. Due to its role in India's prominence in the fourth century, it attained legendary status. From the fifth century to the year 12,000 CE, it was one of the world's most important centres of learning. People from all over the world come to this famous university to study. It is currently a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Go and read up on Nalanda University and see what could be learned/gleaned from this esteemed institution of learning. As a historian, I am very mindful of how one could learn from models in history. Today's universities are too trapped in neo-liberalism and their commodification of knowledge, and they are bereft (or lack) of meaningfulness and mindfulness.

#### **Author 3**

Since education is meant to benefit society, I see a clear connection between curriculum and society. However, we now see that the marketization and commodification of knowledge and the practice of most higher education institutions are inclined towards a business endeavor wherein the purpose of education becomes a profit-making endeavor as opposed to the view that education is for the public good. One will, therefore, need to think carefully about what we mean by impact

on society. The reason is that society is not homogeneous, and it would be naive to think that the notion of impact would be the same for everyone in a given society. In a narrow and less critical approach to evaluating the impact of curriculum on any society, several tools could be used to exercise such an evaluation.

The most influential and impactful of these tools are unfortunately not being measured within education but rather the view of CEOs of big businesses and multinational corporations. Their point of interest in this case is the quality of skill produced by education and its social impact on political stability. Meanwhile, other aspects, such as social and ethical behaviors, social justice, and how education addresses inequality, hardly constitute the social impact of education. I will not blame this shift on politicians or those with a huge appetite for profiteering without taking some disciplinary responsibility for their absence of such a broader evaluation mechanism within the discipline.

For the most part, evaluation in education is limited to assessment and mostly centred in the classroom context. This narrow understanding of the social impact of education led to the reconceptualisation of the curriculum pioneered by Pinar (2019). The link between curriculum evaluation within education and its social impact is still weak. This is because curriculum measurements have predominantly centred on measuring teaching and learning efficiency within the classroom. In contrast, other emerging discourse has limited their engagements within ideological discourses of education on issues of inclusivity, transformation, equality, and technology as a pedagogical tool.

#### Author 4

The methodical process of gathering information to evaluate the worth, efficacy, and quality of programmes in higher education and how they affect the society they serve is known as curriculum evaluation. Therefore, higher education curriculum evaluation could positively impact society if the objectives of setting such a curriculum are attained. For instance, one of the numerous reasons for setting up this level of education is to develop higher-skilled manpower. The sheer volume of skilled workers in different specialty areas that such institutions graduate to join the workforce could help boost the society's economy. Curriculum evaluation at this level could help such societies advance and measure up with the global state-of-the-art professionals and produce the required number of highly skilled experts in different aspects of human endeavor. Curriculum evaluation aids in redefining education and reestablishing the classroom environment, both of which can foster self-sufficient abilities and attitudes that support the need for lifelong learning. According to Gerretson et al. (2010), teachers may find it beneficial to focus on teaching the required curriculum standards to help students meet learning objectives that will enable them to gain relevant experiences that will close the gap between classroom expectations and expectations in the workplace.

**RQ 3:** What evaluation strategy (ies) can be adopted for higher education curricula?

#### Author 1

From my little knowledge and experience as an educational evaluator, evaluating the curriculum, especially the higher education curriculum could take the form of internal, external, and combined (internal-external) evaluation strategies. Internal curriculum evaluation strategy entails the evaluation of the curriculum by students, teachers, and staff of such learning institutions that are closely involved in developing and implementing the curriculum. It is a flexible, cost-effective strategy promoting greater familiarity with the evaluated curriculum. However, this strategy does not, in reality, meet the principles of objectivity and independence. External curriculum evaluation strategy involves the evaluation of the curriculum by consultants, administrators, and inspectors who must have spent long years teaching and running projects or programmes. The main merit of adopting this strategy in evaluating the curriculum is to minimize internal biases and to provide a

fresh and alternative perspective. A high level of expertise and professionalism are paramount to this strategy. The combined curriculum evaluation strategy is an effective strategy that fosters stakeholders' participation, skills, and knowledge development and establishes valued reports and recommendations. This strategy encourages participation and ownership, increasing outcomes' reliability and validity while fostering a more democratic evaluation process.

### Author 2

I think I will go with the ideas of Fullan (2000) and Setiawan (2020), which hinted that curriculum evaluation entails three approaches: the collaborative approach, the voluntary bottom-up approach, and the mandated top-down approach. However, adopting any of these approaches depends on several factors. A collaborative approach to curriculum evaluation, in my view, will mean that you will use multiple role players (teachers, parents, students, curriculum experts, policymakers, funders, etc.) or those with a stake in the curriculum (stakeholders) to form part of the team that will evaluate the curriculum. Suppose all the role players in the curriculum are allowed to participate and contribute. In that case, it is a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach, which is unilaterally decided upon by the most important role player, often the funder or the policy maker/Education Department, overlooking other role players.

All three approaches require that stakeholders (local/internal and external agencies) converge at varying degrees to embrace or discard, negotiate, or re-negotiate the contents of the curriculum. Still, one could look at other exemplary models in the past, like Nalanda University, to know what constitutes best practice. Also, in curriculum theory and development, some evaluation strategies will be spelled out, along with the aims of the evaluation itself. Curriculum evaluation is part of the curriculum development process and usually happens at intervals of 5 or 7 years to determine whether a curriculum still meets its objectives or needs revision. But what is required in South Africa, especially since the Rhodes and Fees Must Fall movements of 2015, is more than mere curriculum evaluation but curriculum transformation. The students demanded curriculum transformation of the content prescribed in higher education institutions away from Western epistemic traditions towards including local and indigenous knowledge systems. Deciding on the nature and form of such transformation requires consensus between different role players. This makes it clear that the standard notion of curriculum evaluation is inadequate and a misnomer within this complex arena.

### Author 3

As a matter of principle, curriculum should be evaluated continuously irrespective of the type or level of education. Curriculum evaluation processes are often informed and shaped by several theoretical processes, especially that of the works of scholars such as Ralph Tyler and Hilda Taba. I see these approaches to curriculum evaluation as technical and systematic because disciplinary norms of curriculum development guide them. Although these approaches appear to be important in curriculum evaluation in higher education, I think they also underpinned a particular understanding of a classroom and learning, raising important contextual questions about where they are being implemented. For instance, the world in which these theoretical principles were designed and implemented was predominantly unipolar and dominated by Western epistemologies.

Who determines what is important to be included in the curriculum and whose knowledge should be more valuable than others? much of this is found in the works of Apple (2012). These questions are what I would consider when thinking about curriculum evaluation in higher education. I think "Politicians" understanding of knowledge and sense of priority becomes paramount to what is incorporated into a curriculum. This also influences how the curriculum is being designed and evaluated. Within the parameters of political position, the higher education curriculum is evaluated.

In this case, it does not matter what curriculum evaluation model or principle one uses; political ideology would still be expressed in the evaluation process.

We are in an era of different ways of knowledge structures in which we now have trans-, intra-, and multi-disciplinarity. There are now discussions of postdisciplinarity. The strategies to be used by educational/curriculum evaluators as a stand-alone discipline may not provide a solution for an effective strategy. Education researchers may need to consider collaboration with other fields or disciplines whose scholarship is more effective outside of the classroom environment. Any method derived from within education must consider an indirect measure method.

#### Author 4

The first strategy to adopt is making evaluation an integral part of higher education curriculum development. This means evaluation should be part of everything the higher education curriculum developers do. They should plan the curriculum with assessment in mind, gather data frequently, and apply this information to refine the course material. Adhering to the participatory evaluation practice is another tactic to guarantee inclusive evaluation. Making sure that every stakeholder is involved is necessary to achieve this. Many evaluation strategies that can serve as models to guide the evaluation of higher education curricula abound. Notable among them are Tyler Model, Taba Model, Stake's Antecedent Transaction and Output (ATO) Model, Cronbach's Model, Stufflebeam's Content, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) Model, Kaufman Roger's Discrepancy Model, Scriven's Model, formative and summative model, and Krikpatrick's model. These models explain the what, why, and how of a process. They provide a framework for designing a particular evaluation considering the specific purpose of the evaluation.

Consistency with the objectives, alignment with the standards established for each type of higher education curriculum, and thorough examination of every facet of the curriculum should be employed as additional strategies for curriculum evaluation. It is difficult to gather information on some of the objectives effectively and objectively, so many evaluation studies carried out by researchers do not cover the entire range of objectives set for the programme being evaluated (e.g., the affective domain where value traits such as integrity and honesty are not always tested). Only a small percentage of the knowledge on the development of intellectual skills falls under the cognitive domain, which is tested. According to Michael Scriven (1973), curriculum evaluation can be divided into two main categories: formative and summative. As the name suggests, formative evaluation occurs at the beginning of curriculum development or during curriculum implementation. These exercises are helpful if the educational system needs guidance on how to optimise higher education outcomes or best accomplish the stated objectives. One type of formative evaluation is the need assessment, which can reveal information about the beneficiaries' preferred curriculum. This approach could also be used to assess the extent of the need, identify the most effective way to address it, and offer guidance on the qualities the curriculum should include to address these needs.

Summative evaluation, as the name implies, is conducted when learners have completed a targeted instruction curriculum. Information from such evaluation should be able to establish the extent to which students exposed to such curriculum have attained the expected learning outcomes. Summative evaluation investigates the extent to which the outcomes of such curriculum are met. These results could include changes in the recipients of the curriculum over the short, medium, or long term. For instance, evaluations of the curriculum in higher education could examine how participants' knowledge, abilities, attitudes, intentions, or behaviors have improved and how the curriculum has affected the entire school, community, organization, society, or environment.

#### Discussion

This autoethnographic reflective paper explored the essence, impacts, and strategies for curriculum evaluation for African higher education. The study's findings have revealed that evaluating the



higher education curriculum provides it with the expectation of what a curriculum should be, as well as meeting global standards, competitiveness, and societal needs (Fomunyan, 2022). This finding supports the argument made by Agbaje (2023) that higher education institutions should adopt a curriculum that is in line with the unique characteristics of African societies, which can be accomplished through evaluation. Agbaje (2023) calls for a review of the goals and content of higher education curricula in Africa. This reinforces the claims made by Kumar and Rewari (2022) that it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to prepare students for the future, which may be achieved through curriculum evaluation.

The education system's standard (quality and quantity) is improved through curriculum evaluation. Governments utilise the reports of curriculum evaluation as a basis for improved educational funding, social amenities provision, employment creation, planning and execution of manpower training and professional development of individuals both within and outside her workforce, and for international comparison and competitiveness, amongst others (Afful-Broni et al., 2020; Agbaje, 2023; Setlhako & Msila, 2013), specially the space race between the USSR and the USA in the 1950s. The USA recognised that its educational system was lagging behind the USSR after the USSR launched Sputnik in 1957, and they began emphasising science and maths in their curricula. Then, in 1968, they landed on the moon. In addition to making sure that the curriculum does more than merely educate students for the workforce, curriculum evaluation may instill criticality in students, fostering their ability to be ethical, critical, and perceptive citizens who will work towards a more just and compassionate society (Blignaut, 2021). A curriculum is always context and time-dependent; hence, it needs to be evaluated timeously, as what is appropriate and relevant today might not be so in 5 years' time (Baiyelo, 2003). Curriculum evaluators need to assess a curriculum periodically to determine if the outcomes or goals of the curriculum are being achieved.

Findings also indicate that curriculum evaluation does bring about positive transformation in the general standard of education (Setlhako & Msila, 2013). This supports the claims made by Mahardhani et al. (2023) that courses in higher education should change to meet industrial demands by equipping students with the information and abilities required for this era. As the curriculum is evaluated, the weaknesses and inefficiencies in the education system are tackled, and a more improved system is enlivened (Ngobeni et al., 2023). The context in which the evaluated curriculum is adopted would be configured in line with the curriculum (Motala et al., 2021). The curriculum's design, content, delivery, and assessment strategies can all be improved with the help of evaluations (Nevenglosky et al., 2019). It also enhances the quality of teaching and learning within an educational setting. Curriculum evaluation is improving the curriculum's relevance, efficacy, and responsiveness to learners' and society's needs and interests (Alsubaie, 2016). Curriculum evaluation facilitates the measurement of teaching and learning efficiencies within the classroom, the quality of skills impacted on graduates, and its social, economic, and political impacts (Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015).

Findings show that evaluation strategies that could be adopted for higher education curricula are diverse and context-oriented. This concurs with the opinions of Amin and Mahabeer (2021), who believe that both short-term and long-term measures should be taken right away to improve higher education curricula. These measures include removing out-of-date curricula, reorganising existing ones, and adding pertinent content, skills, and competencies. We maintain that there is no fast rule on what strategy to use in curriculum evaluation. It is left to the curriculum users/beneficiaries, implementers, and developers to decide on what strategy best suits their immediate needs, resulting from their situational analysis (Bellocchi et al., 2016; Downes et al., 2017; Marope, 2015). Nevertheless, we think that any of these strategies could be useful: internal, external, and combined (internal-external) evaluation strategies; the collaborative approach, the voluntary bottom-up approach, and the mandatory top-down approach; the trans-, intra-, multi-, and postdisciplinarity approaches (Aslan & Günay, 2016; Aygören & Er, 2019).

## Implications of Higher Education Curriculum Evaluation

A more relevant, appropriate, time and context-dependent university/curricula is achievable via evaluation. A university that will truly serve societal needs (in service of society). Curricula evaluation blurs the boundaries between universities/academia/academics and societies and becomes more engaged in the life of societies. Modern universities operate/function too much in silos/isolation/ Eiffel towers; thus, re-connecting these universities and turning them into citadels for the search of solutions in resolving pressing societal problems or challenges, as well as other crucial functions will require a critical evaluation of their curricula. Teachers in African schools have not significantly benefited from adopting Eurocentric approaches to curriculum implementation that disregard contextual factors. As such, there is a need to adopt several effective evaluation strategies to enhance the implementation of the higher education curriculum (Sone & Oluwasuji, 2021).

Without an effective conceptualization and measurement, any education system could be jeopardised. On the one hand, Africa needs a strong, contextually relevant education that speaks to its social, cultural, and economic fabrics. On the other hand, such an education should be futuristic in that it anticipates the future it aspires for and puts practical measures in place to achieve those futuristic goals. Unfortunately, every continent sees Africa's potential except Africans themselves. The problem lies within Africa's research institutions, and universities' research findings are hardly considered part of political considerations. Research and innovation are not a priority area for investment. This has made education in Africa rely on Western theories and become consumers of Western industrial production. The advent of technology will exacerbate an already precarious situation should Africa continue in its current trajectory.

All parties involved will benefit more from a well-thought-out and meticulously carried out curriculum evaluation than one that is put together quickly and without much thought. This is because evaluation results are likely to demonstrate the following if the evaluators make sure that the varied perspectives of stakeholders, such as students, parents, teachers, administrative staff, and community members, are taken into account and that results are as complete and unbiased as possible: more fully comprehend the needs of the target audiences and how to satisfy them; create goals that are more attainable and quantifiable; track goals more successfully and efficiently; identify the advantages and disadvantages of the curriculum; assist curriculum interpreters in determining how to measure these aims and objectives as well as how to gather, examine, and apply this. This procedure will assist in guaranteeing that your goals are quantifiable and that all learning domains are covered; proof that the curriculum is meeting or failing to meet all of its stated objectives; assist stakeholders in determining which interventions to prioritise in order to improve output quality and effectiveness; assist in identifying what is and is not working so that solutions can be proposed for improvement; ascertain whether other approaches should be used to support programme objectives; and assist in the evaluation of standards regarding the applicability, sufficiency, advancement, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of an intervention.

## Conclusion

A robust higher education curriculum evaluation in Africa is possible and attainable when the challenges (non-availability or inadequate curriculum materials in higher education institutions, poor funding for education, non-availability or inadequate professional development opportunities, corruption, inadequate evaluation experts, skepticism of and resistance of education and curriculum stakeholders, instability and insecurity in many parts of the continent) hampering its actual implementation is addressed (Nsikak-Abasi *et al.*, 2023; Ogunode *et al.*, 2020). For higher education curricula to meet the expectations of the 21st century, their evaluation should be regularly and collectively carried out by education players and actors (students, academics, school administrators, curriculum designers, and policymakers) (Priestly *et al.*, 2021). A thorough and

organised framework is also required for evaluating curricula, particularly in higher education. Thus, efforts should be made to ensure quality curriculum evaluations by developing examination test items covering all learning domains (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor). In light of Bloom's taxonomy, the different learning objective levels (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) must also be considered. We recommend conducting additional research to determine Africa's higher education curriculum's viability, relevance, and sufficiency, considering the demands of AI-driven societies in the twenty-first century. Given the new realities of AI and the 4th Industrial Revolution, new frameworks are required.

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