Chapter 5

Teaching Dis/courses about Africa: Epistemic Reflections and Active Pedagogies in Humanities Education

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Introduction

In this chapter, we embark on a comprehensive exploration of epistemological observations using the Flipped Classroom model to contest misconceptions about Africa. Our study examines the impact of this active pedagogical approach on students' academic performance in South Africa and Nigeria. Analysing the comparative epistemic reflections of implementing this model in Humanities education allows us to understand its effectiveness in diverse educational contexts. The shared reflections draw on experiences with the Flipped Classroom model in first-year Literary Studies in English modules at Rhodes University in South Africa and Communication in English modules at Chrisland University in Nigeria. These insights are grounded in practical application and detailed analysis of how the Flipped Classroom model can challenge predominant stereotypes about Africa and enhance students' understanding of African literature and culture.

The faculties of Humanities at Rhodes and Chrisland Universities comprise students from various disciplines, including Arts (Fine Art, Drama and Music), Development Studies, Journalism and Media Studies, Literature, Linguistics, History, Political Science, Psychology, Philosophy, and Sociology. While Humanities disciplines are essential for fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, and ethical understanding, the way these fields of study are currently taught and structured in many educational institutions in Africa is deeply flawed (Afolayan et al., 2021). The chapter argues that prevailing traditional didactic teaching methods, where students are passive recipients of information and the lecturer dominates the instructional process, are inadequate for addressing the complex realities of contemporary Africa. Our teaching methods move away from the hierarchical lecturer-student dynamics that promote rote memorisation, and focusing on experiential learning.

Notably, traditional teaching approaches fail to engage students actively or develop their critical thinking skills essential for understanding and addressing Africa's multifaceted challenges. We recommend an urgent shift from traditional didactic methods to innovative and comparative student-centric approaches that utilise the digital age's vast informational resources. This transformation enhances the relevance of Humanities subjects and empowers students to challenge prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions about Africa and its population. At the beginning of the semester, we instruct students to choose pre-class material from a wide array of textual sources and various mediums, including films, documentaries, memes, blogs, vlogs, newspaper articles, magazines, cartoons, news broadcasting channels (television and radio) and social media. The eclectic approach of incorporating multimodal texts that combine visual, auditory and textual elements is essential to demystify stereotypes, myths, and superstitions about Africa and Africans.

Instead of merely focusing on curated information from textbooks and academic journals, we encourage students to find relevant learning material on social media platforms. Students

are tasked with interrogating the motivations behind hackneyed stereotypes about Africa and Africans in different sources and made to assess the implications of these portrayals. Hence, we have considered how the historical, social, and political contexts influence how African cultures and identities are depicted. We argue that such a transition from passive transmission of information to active involvement is the hallmark of effective learning. In our teaching, we give precedence to student-centric and active pedagogies, specifically the Self-Mirror Method, Media-Assisted Method, and African-Author-Philosophy Method, all within the Flipped Classroom model. Improvising our application of flipped learning facilitates collaborative and experiential learning, which is vital for thoroughly analysing historical events, cultural representations, and contemporary issues through a decolonial lens.

Additionally, through a Flipped Classroom setting, students engage with a wide range of representations, including those that might be marginalised or misrepresented in mainstream media. During lectures, students would compare and share their findings from these diverse sources, establishing links with the primary texts that are studied in the course. This comparative analysis helps to identify departures and overtures in the stereotypes of Africa. Juxtaposing social media narratives with traditional primary texts, enables students to discern how contemporary depictions align with or diverge from historical and cultural realities. The chapter will discuss the active learning strategies employed in the Flipped Classroom, including pre-class reading assignments, in-class discussions, tutorial group activities, and interactive projects.

With regard to the audience, we aim to objectively examine the pedagogical opportunities and shared challenges of teaching undergraduate Humanities courses in tertiary institutions in South Africa and Nigeria. The epistemic reflections and Flipped Classroom pedagogy that we advocate are not only pertinent to the teaching of literature but also relevant to other disciplines such as political science and development studies. Addressing these broader academic contexts emphasises the versatility and transformative potential of these pedagogical strategies, while

also arguing for their widespread adoption to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes across diverse fields of study.

Aligning Culturally Responsive Teaching with Demographic-Sensitive Course Content

We have been teaching English 1, which is an introductory course, at Rhodes University and Chrisland University for more than three years. The first-year course is structured into semester-long modules: ENG 101: Introduction to Genre and Academic Writing and ENG 102: Postcolonial Literature and Communication in English 101 and 102, respectively. This curriculum explicitly aims to confront and dismantle misconceptions about Africa in the twenty-first century. Employing the Flipped Classroom model, we actively immerse students in an interpretive analysis of the complex social, cultural, and historical contexts that frame the mis/representation of Africa. At Rhodes University, the English degree programme allocates 40% of its coursework to African literature, primarily concentrated in the first year, with additional African literature courses available as electives in the second and third years. In contrast, Chrisland University allocates 50% of its coursework to African literature in the second semester of the first year, with the remaining 50% dedicated to courses in writing, linguistics, cultural studies, and communication that allow for a broader exploration of related disciplines.

Our research questions the epistemic valence caused by the lecturer-centric methods of pedagogy which tend to limit students' creativity and knowledge experience. We are aware that our cultural backgrounds and identities play a significant role in shaping our approach to teaching and research. As educators in South Africa and Nigeria, we bring our own experiences and understandings of African culture and literature into the classroom. This cultural context informs the selection of texts, the framing of discussions, and the interpretation of literary works. It also affects how we perceive and address

the diverse cultural identities of our students. The class sizes and student demographics at Rhodes University and Chrisland University highlight significant disparities that necessitate tailored approaches to instruction and curriculum development. At Rhodes University, class sizes fluctuate from 250 to 400 students, presenting challenges and opportunities for student interaction and instructional quality.

Likewise, Chrisland University maintains large class sizes, typically with about 350 to 400 students. On one hand, the demographics of students at Rhodes University, comprising 84% historically disadvantaged black students (including local and international students from various African countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Malawi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Namibia), 8% coloured, 6% white, and 2% Indian, highlight a heterogenous and multicultural student body. On the other hand, students at Chrisland University are predominantly black and hail from different ethnic backgrounds which brings a different dimension of diversity within the student population.

The teaching approach at Rhodes University consists of eight 45-minute lectures per week, divided into three sessions, followed by six weekly 45-minute tutorials with each small group comprising 15 students. The lectures and tutorials are ostensibly designed to blend direct instruction with interactive learning. However, such a structure does not fully exploit the potential for active student engagement and critical thinking. In stark contrast, Chrisland University maintains larger size classes, typically ranging from 150 to 200 students. These classes are conducted through hourly sessions or groups of two with a two-hour lecture per week cumulating into a total lecture-hour of 24 in a semester. Even so, the large class sizes and extended lecture periods at Chrisland University sometimes compromise the intimacy of learning. The hourly lecture format, without an accompanying tutorial session, fails to capitalise on the prospect for active learning and critical analysis that a segmented instructional approach could make available. The Flipped Classroom model provides a strategic solution to the

instructional challenges faced by both Rhodes University and Chrisland University.

To address these challenges, we employed a two-pronged approach. Firstly, we restructured our class time to prioritise active learning and collaboration. Such a move also propelled us to redesign the course content and ensure it bolsters educational outcomes. Secondly, we utilised a combination of observational methods, including self-reflection journals, direct observation during class, and focus group discussions, to assess the Flipped Classroom's impact on student learning and participation in South Africa and Nigeria. These observational methods were used over a period of three years (2021 to 2023) to determine whether our pedagogical strategies are effective and responsive to students' needs in Humanities education. Furthermore, our epistemic reflections are firmly guided by Paulo Freire's (2005) theorisation of Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy. Within this theoretical framework, we conduct interdisciplinary discussions that address the enduring consequences of silenced narratives, challenge power structures, advance social justice, and promote a nuanced understanding of Africa and its global position.

Historical Context and Thoughts on African Epistemic Emancipation

There is no denying that variegated understandings of Africa abound in Humanities education. The intrinsic undercurrent shaping contemporary African epistemic consciousness presupposes a deliberate awareness of African colonial history, its enduring legacies of coloniality, and the ideological and policy hegemony that continue to affect the present. In this context, epistemic reflections pertain to the examination of the nature and scope of knowledge within the Humanities domain, while active pedagogies involve engaging students through participatory and hands-on learning methods. The first step towards epistemic decolonisation in Africa is for African instructors to candidly accept the fact that the Eurocentric epistemic model which is currently being used in many African

learning institutions is essentially problematic and ideologically slanted to the detriment of Africa.

This realisation will lead to the next step which draws from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1994) concept of "decolonising the mind". Although Thiong'o (1994) makes his decolonisation argument from the standpoint of linguistic emancipation in the production of literary works, the self-awareness that shapes the ideation needs to be embraced and channelled towards a systematic approach with a non-standalone poise. It is essential to critique the dominating influence of Western ways of knowing and subjugation (Lopez & Rugano, 2018). This is important because "no single indigenous experience dominate[s] other perspectives, no one heritage informs it, and no two heritages produce the same knowledge" (Battiste, 2013:616). Correspondingly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021:2) contends that merely deconstructing Western scholarship is insufficient. Therefore, we should harness the power of 'counter-stories' as potent forms of resistance and alternative futures.

The colonial project envisioned universities as tools for the conquest and domination of the colonised societies. These institutions were never neutral but strategically established to serve the interests of the colonial powers by providing the kind of education that aligned with their cultural, economic, and administrative objectives of social control. The curriculum, administrative structure, and overall ethos of these universities were designed to perpetuate the colonial narrative and reinforce the existing power dynamics. Since the problem is intrinsically tied to a hegemonic mindset, it is important that African educators in the Humanities come up with epistemic methods that counter the perpetuating Eurocentric mindset of global cultural dominance. An inclusive decolonialised approach, if deployed in tertiary education, could lead to the birth of what could be called epistemic hybridity.

The counteracting techniques will gradually develop a broader self-awareness and ultimately lead to what Dorothy Kerzner Lipsky & Alan Gartner (1999:12) call inclusive education. According to them, inclusive education comes from

a democratic culture, a consciousness which is "in recognition of the limits of our understanding, and particularly of the constraints of our own cultural and ideological perspectives". Our use of the term 'colonialism' extends beyond geographical, political and financial domains to encompass knowledge production and critiques of thought leadership. Achille Mbembe (2015) criticises how Western epistemologies are legitimised and presented as the norm in African universities. We contend that privileging Western perspectives, theories, and paradigms has considerable influence on academic curricula but also permeates global conversations, shaping how issues in literature and Media Studies are framed and understood.

In our teaching, we first demonstrate to our students what we expect them to do when critiquing the negative portrayal of Africa in Western media and literature. The rationale for this exercise is to highlight how political rhetoric is a pervasive issue that contributes to harmful stereotypes and misperceptions about the continent. For instance, we project a PowerPoint slide of the famous photograph taken by Kevin Carter of a vulture perched near an emaciated young girl during the famine in Sudan in 1993 to show how it was used to selectively focus on extreme suffering. We then explain to students how Carter's image portrays Africans as passive victims lacking agency and resilience to address their challenges. Furthermore, we ask students to objectively assess the underlying structural issues that are deliberately glossed over in Carter's photograph, which perpetuate a superficial understanding of the continent's challenges.

We also use an excerpt from the American-based *Economist* Magazine, which ran a headline declaring "Hopeless Africa" in the year 2000 (Economist, 2000) and ask students to draw connections with the negative sentiments echoed by President Donald Trump in 2018 when he referred to African countries as "shitholes" (Vitali et al., 2018). We explain how such sweeping generalisations and affronts create an "us versus them" mentality informed by a Western gaze. The focus here is to demonstrate how Carter's photograph, the Economist headline, and Trump's rhetoric stem from preconceived

notions that reflect lingering post-colonial stereotypes. These portrayals reinforce an inaccurate one-dimensional view of the continent. To help students to understand how stereotypes work, we assign tutorial work focusing on a close reading of Binyavanga Wainaina's (2005) satirical essay *How to Write About Africa* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) impactful TED Talk titled *The Danger of a Single Story*. This exercise deepens their awareness of misconceptions about Africa, particularly the representation of Africa as a monolithic entity that is commonly mistaken for a single country with a 'single story.'

The lesson objectives are twofold. First, students must critically interrogate the notions of 'historical truths' to highlight the dangers of relying on a singular narrative to represent a continent with diverse cultures. Second, they must demonstrate how language and communication innately normalise prejudiced attitudes, perpetuate historical legacies, and reinforce colonial power structures. According to Foucault (1975:30), each society establishes its own "regime of truth" encompassing the types of discourse that it considers truthful, the mechanisms distinguishing true statements from the false ones, and the status of those responsible for defining truth. Given this backdrop, discourses are not static entities but are active subjects that shape and are being shaped by the cultural and historical contexts in which they operate. The understanding here is that discourses reproduce power inequalities and cannot be isolated from the broader cultural and contextual influences that configure them. How students learn and apply knowledge is deeply connected to the discourses prevalent in their academic environment. Moreover, educational discourses are particularly relevant in the context of anti-misconception pedagogies, where the goal is to challenge and dispel myths, stereotypes and fallacies. To teach courses about Africa without misinforming students, educators must be intentional in incorporating anti-misconception pedagogies.

Reading between Cultures: Towards a Decolonised Humanities Curriculum

The imperative to decolonise Humanities curricula at Rhodes University and Chrisland University represents a crucial step towards developing relevant educational experience for students. Both institutions face significant challenges and opportunities in addressing the legacy of Western-centric education and promoting a curriculum that reflects the diverse cultural contexts of their student bodies. This critical argument posits that decolonising the Humanities curriculum is not only necessary but also beneficial for achieving educational equity and cultural relevance in higher education. Literature as a scholarship is one fluid domain of the Humanities where people pander to various kinds of subjectivities. Literary Studies also holds the power to influence perceptions and challenge assumptions. Moreover, literature functions as a bridge between disciplines, creating interdisciplinary connections that enhance the overall educational experience. However, some of the prescribed texts in the Humanities curriculum inadvertently reinforce stereotypes and limited perspectives about Africa.

An analysis of the curriculum and its implications is crucial for a nuanced understanding of African identities. For instance, certain Western writers, such as Joseph Conrad, Enid Blyton, Rudyard Kipling and Karen Blixen, have faced severe accusations of veiling their racist biases in literary works through elusive metaphors and hurtful innuendos. Moreover, this body of work by Western writers collectively forms what Valentin-Yves Mudimbe (1994:ix) refers to as the "colonial library." Its primary objective was to facilitate the understanding and exoticising of Africa, reflecting the power dynamics and imperialistic ambitions of the late nineteenth-century colonial enterprise. At its core, the concept of the 'colonial library' highlights the deliberate construction of knowledge aimed at reinforcing hierarchical relationships between the coloniser and the colonised.

Despite the potential psychological impact of Eurocentric texts, the detrimental aspect is the continued use

of educational curricula in many tertiary institutions in Africa that are tailored to Western models. The scale of the problem of Western-centric educational curricula dominating African tertiary institutions is substantial, as evidenced by the research findings of Cross and Govender (2021). Their examination of curriculum content, teaching methods, and educational philosophies in African universities reveals a pervasive influence and prevalence of Western content which not only marginalises Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural expressions but also perpetuates a Eurocentric worldview amongst African students (Cross & Govender, 2021). The university as a space for intellectual exploration and growth becomes a crucible for the synthesis of diverse knowledge systems, stimulating an environment where students confront, question, and broaden their understanding. Saleem Badat (2010) and Carol Bertram (2022) argue that the South African education system still suffers from the burden of Western epistemic hegemony and is in dire need of decolonisation, academic freedom, and gender egalitarianism. This kind of crisis is also present in many other African academic institutions.

Tertiary institutions tend to overlook the influence of socio-economic factors, unequal access to resources, and historical disadvantages that significantly impact learning. For example, financial constraints, and the need for sustained efforts to decolonise the university curriculum ignited a wave of student protests in South Africa, such as the "#RhodesMustFall" in 2015 and "#FeesMustFall" in 2016 (Hodes, 2016). These student-led protest movements questioned the entrenched institutional power structures within South African universities. While these movements achieved considerable milestones, the need for sustained efforts to decolonise education remains a focal point of discussion. It is therefore imperative for educators in the Humanities to adopt teaching methods and theories that consciously promote an African worldview and support cultural emancipation. Embracing these approaches is vital for dismantling entrenched colonial perspectives and cultivating an inclusive and culturally pertinent educational experience.

Although this study does not intend to promote a stand-alone pedagogical philosophy that could ultimately alienate Africans from globalisation, it deliberately encourages a careful conditioning of the mind towards decolonialised assimilation and learning. For this reason, there is an urgent need to re-evaluate and rethink how courses in the Humanities are curated and taught. When designing the Humanities curriculum, educators should factor cultural competency to accurately and ethically represent the Indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledge systems are embodied and not solely cognitive; they are deeply rooted in physical experiences and sensory perceptions. Western academic traditions, which have markedly influenced global education systems, usually prioritise written documentation and textual analysis. This tradition favours the written word as a structured and "objective" form of knowledge. The preference for the written word over embodied knowledge is evident in Western cultures, which have historically dominated academic discourse. For instance, these cultures place a higher value on written communication forms than on oral or embodied traditions present in other cultures.

However, the richness of African art forms affords unique learning opportunities through its various forms, such as folk tales, praise poetry, Griot performances, songs, chants, rock paintings, and sculptures. We observed that some lessons that incorporate folk tales could be effectively and practically taught through performances. It is noteworthy that the inclusion of canonical novels such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) in many African institutions of higher education, especially at the first-year level, is strategic for several reasons. Unlike some literature that romanticises precolonial and colonial Africa, both novels present a nuanced perspective, showcasing the potential for development within African societies while also acknowledging their imperfections. In doing so, both novels encourage students to question ubiquitious stereotypes and to recognise the importance of counter-narratives in shaping accurate understanding of Africa's past and present.

Our approach included the use of common literary texts taught in most universities in Africa. As an alternative to focusing solely on the paperback versions, we also allowed students to use audiobooks of the same texts. This enabled us to implement teaching strategies that proved effective across different educational settings. We observed that students at Chrisland University, for example, could better understand the proverbs and oral traditions used by Chinua Achebe, since his novel is steeped in the Igbo pre-colonial worldview. In contrast, students from South Africa, and by extension, Southern Africa, could readily relate to the chiShona customs depicted in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. The comparative approach highlighted the diverse cultural contexts within Africa and demonstrated how regional perspectives enhances the understanding of African literature. Incorporating multimedia sources and allowing students to study the material in different formats challenged the traditional focus on written texts and promoted a vibrant and inclusive learning environment.

Pedagogical Methods and Epistemic Dynamism in Humanities Education

The intersection of epistemic reflections and active pedagogies in the Humanities education represents a progressive approach to learning in the digital age, which has transformed how information is disseminated and consumed, with social media platforms playing a central role in either shaping or dismantling stereotypes and fake news (Tian et al., 2023). Studies have shown that the constant barrage of information and the quick, fragmented consumption patterns promoted by social media platforms contribute to shorter attention spans and a reduced ability to focus on longer and complex texts (De Castell & Jenson, 2004; Lee, 2024). This phenomenon directly impacts the reading of literary texts, which traditionally requires prolonged concentration and deep cognitive processing. Recognising that the attention economy of students is deteriorating because of the influx of social media content, we have adapted our teaching strategies accordingly.

Engaging African literature through new media provides valuable insights into colonial and postcolonial politics and development in Africa. Furthermore, reimagining Humanities education should centre on active pedagogies that highlight the importance of re-reading texts and narratives. The Flipped Classroom approach goes beyond conventional methods of interpretation and encourages three objectives. Firstly, a Flipped Classroom disrupts singular, hegemonic narratives that are inherent in dominant discourses. It prompts students to astutely question dominant perspectives astutely, recognising that any narrative to create has multiple layers and dimensions. Secondly, it also encourages multivocality, allowing educators to invite students to explore and recognise the varied viewpoints within a text or narrative. The advantage of multivocality is that it includes voices that have been historically marginalised or silenced. Lastly, it highlights contextual sensitivity, enabling students to consider the intersectionality of identities and experiences.

Understanding the context in which a text or narrative is situated is essential, as interpretations often vary according to historical, cultural, and social conditions. In the complex dynamics of colonial encounters, literary texts produced on both sides of the colonial divide commonly participate in a process of appropriation and inscription, wherein elements of one culture are assimilated and integrated into the narratives of the other. This interplay reflects the entanglements of cultures during periods before and after colonialism, clarifying how various influences and exchanges shape the literary expressions emerging from both the colonisers and the colonised. Therefore, a liberal pedagogy should embrace the negative and positives from both ends.

Paulo Freire (2005) conceptualises education as a transformative and liberatory process that transcends the mere unidirectional flow of information from lecturer to student. Put simply, flawed systems of education treat students as passive receptacles of knowledge. In critiquing the prevalent "banking concept of education," Freire (2005:247) laments its contribution to a hierarchical and oppressive education system,

hindering the cultivation of critical thinking and debate. This 'banking' approach, inhibits the development of independence, agency and intellectual curiosity. In contrast, an interactive and participatory educational model inspired by Freire's (2005) insights is a foundational element for Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy. The aforementioned educational approaches prioritise interaction, participation, and critical thinking as central elements of the learning process.

These active pedagogies align with the constructivist epistemology, which posits lecturers and students as active participants and co-creators of knowledge. We argue that Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy cut both ways and and build upon the existing understanding and experiences of students. The Flipped Classroom model is a component of the Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy because it challenges the traditional pedagogical order that positions the lecturer as the sole repository and dispenser of knowledge. To overcome the limitations of traditional pedagogy, educators and students should participate in a reciprocal process of learning to create an environment where critical thinking is nurtured and reflexivity is encouraged. Global awareness is a necessary mien that every serious contemporary African literature should reflect in its characterisation, topicality, plot, and thematic preoccupation, yet its treatment and ideological engineering should necessarily be African. This is necessary because reading concepts like masculinity, feminism, cultural development, justice, liberty, individualism, sovereignty, democracy, nationalism, and identity in African literature with a Eurocentric lens and binoculars only succeeds in perpetuating the misconceptions of unbridled consumerism, credulity, slothfulness, barbarism, and dependency that the Western world has created about Africa. After coming to terms with the imperatives of the decolonised mind, educators in the Humanities should operationalise Afrocentric nuances of a pedagogical method like the Flipped Classroom. The integration of the Flipped Classroom model in education aligns with the *Ubuntu* philosophy, exemplifying interconnectedness, collaboration, and shared learning experiences. Moreover, the Flipped Classroom model creates

an intersectionality with the Western concept of teamwork, promoting an inclusive and cooperative educational environment. This collaborative or co-learning approach diminishes the performance pressure habitually associated with traditional teaching methods and mitigates the pitfalls of competitiveness and individualism. Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy challenge the commonly held notion that universities operate as impartial meritocratic institutions, where success is solely determined by individual effort and ability. Consequently, the focus on personal achievement and success in Humanities education is repeatedly at the expense of acknowledging systemic barriers and inequalities.

The chapter, while emphasising deviations in the teaching of Humanities education, also provides a schema for educators willing to meet their students halfway and improvise. This recognition of divergence from traditional approaches suggests an openness to alternative pedagogies that better identify with the diverse backgrounds and experiences of both educators and students. We submit that utilising epistemic reflections and active learning pedagogies in Humanities education meaningfully enhances students' agency. Flipped learning also works as a critical tool in the ongoing process of evaluating and questioning our teaching methods, especially when confronted with the notion of "sanctioned ignorance," as articulated by Giyatri Spivak (1999:30). What matters most is acknowledging and valuing the diverse backgrounds and experiences that students bring to the learning environment, specifically in the flipped mode of epistemic engineering.

The validation of their lived experiences and socio-dynamics allows students to discuss subjects of personal interest and relate them to course content. This key understanding propels us to share three key insights derived from our alternative teaching and learning methods, which aim to advance an inclusive, diverse, and culturally grounded approach to Humanities education. These insights consist of the Self-Mirror Method, the Media Assisted Method, and the African-Author- Philosophy Method. However, we want to clarify that the epistemic reflections put forth in this discussion

are not intended to be exhaustive; instead, they operate as a foundational starting point for further exploration and development of effective teaching methodologies.

Self-Mirror Method (Also, African Mirror Method)

Firstly, we use the Self-Mirror Method, also known as the African Mirror Method. This model of Flipped Classroom pedagogy aims to help students identify with African literature on a personal level. We begin the class discussion by explaining the metaphor of the mirror to the students, discussing how a mirror reflects one's true appearance, including any blemishes, and how this analogy applies to reading literature. However, self-mirroring as a reading strategy should not be confused with epiphany, which is a narrative technique. In contrast to epiphany, which is a sudden self-awareness or consciousness affecting a character within a story, self-mirroring is a pre-structured reading consciousness that students use to better understand African literature, worldview, politics and history. It should also not be confused with the didactic function of literature, which presents the literary work as one that seeks to moralise or instruct the reader through its narrative essence and denouement.

Using the Self-Mirroring Method, we aimed to locate and address the potentially dislocated epistemic consciousness of students. Such an approach encourages students to carefully consider voices and perspectives that are commonly silenced in the multimodal texts that they study. During class discussions we asked students to share their initial thoughts and feelings about their selected multimodal texts, focusing on the personal connections that they could identify and whether these texts reflect their culture, experiences, and identity. We noted that students from Rhodes University and Chrisland University chose pre-class multimodal texts that identify with their study disciplines, cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. One striking feature observed during the presentations was the distinct differences in students' selections.

These variations highlighted the diverse perspectives and interpretations brought to the fore. The preference of Chrisland University students for Nollywood films highlights a regional affinity and a desire to see African stories told by Africans. Interestingly, the pre-class reading material that they chose was predominantly from West Africa. For example, *TikTok* videos by Charity Ekezie (Ekezie, 2022), who uses humour to dismantle stereotypes about Africa. They also utilised *YouTube* videos by Ghanaian freelance vlogger and travel influencer, Wode Maya (Maya, 2025), who travels across Africa challenging misrepresentations of African countries. Charity Ekezie's *TikTok* videos and Wode Maya's *YouTube* content provide African perspectives that counteract stereotypical narratives mainly perpetuated by Western media. Additionally, they highlighted how recent African movies (Nollywood movies) have shifted their focus from themes of violent crime, poverty, and witchcraft to showcasing success stories of West Africans across various fields.

Conversely, many students from Rhodes University focused on Hollywood films, *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (Uys, 1980), *Mr. Bones* (Schuster et al., 2001), *Tears of the Sun* (Lasker & Cirillo, 2003), and *Blood Diamond* (Leavitt & Mitchell, 2006), which stereotypically depict Africans as incompetent and helpless buffoons, while regularly presenting a white saviour narrative. Some students at Rhodes University opted to analyse movies like *Black Panther* (Coogler et al., 2018), *Coming to America* (Murphy et al., 1988), and the reality show *Young, Famous and African* (Hyde & Amankwa, 2022), which aim to portray Africa positively. The class was sometimes divided over particular movies. Some students argued that these narratives romanticised Africa in an idyllic manner and questioned why prominent roles in Hollywood movies about Africa are usually given to African American actors, suggesting that it implies that Africans are incapable of acting. For example, some students argued that *Black Panther* portrayed a positive representation of Africa, while others contended that Wakanda, as an isolated technologically advanced state, contradicted the principles of *Ubuntu*. The students who would have chosen *Coming to America*,

countered this by arguing that Africa's lack of unity necessitated Wakanda's secrecy. This difference in choices highlights the varied cultural lenses through which students view and analyse stereotypes of Africa. This exercise helps to establish nuanced connections with the canonical novels that they are studying as well. Comparing these approaches, we argue that the Self-Mirror Method encourages a personal connection with African literature and instills a sense of identity and cultural pride. This comparative analysis reveals how the Flipped Classroom model, when tailored to the cultural contexts of students, effectively challenges misconceptions and enriches their learning experience. The Flipped Classroom discussions that we had demonstrated the transformative potential of culturally relevant pedagogy in the Humanities, making literature accessible and meaningful for students across diverse educational settings.

Media-Assisted Method

We noted that using the above-mentioned pre-class assignments helped to bridge the gap between students' media habits and academic requirements. Presenting literature through various formats, such as film adaptations, and interactive media, allows educators to capture students' attention effectively. This approach resonates with students' media consumption patterns and also enhances their understanding of literary texts through multiple perspectives and interpretations. Students from both universities were able to connect the continuities and discontinuities of these stereotypes across different media formats. Particularly, students from Political Science and Journalism critiqued the reportage of news by Western media outlets like BBC, France 24, and CNN, juxtaposing it with Bird, a new Africa-based story agency. They observed that Western media regularly recycled images of war-torn regions, malnourished children, and empty shop shelves to perpetuate a singular narrative. Nevertheless, they did not initially realise that their engagement with these multimodal texts was a form of critical discourse analysis. Their lack of this awareness reflects Freire's Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy,

which emphasise a dialogue of critical perspectives for better learning outcomes.

Through the Media-Assisted Method, students collaboratively annotated texts and co-authored essays that retell African stories misrepresented by outsiders. The use of a combination of written literary texts and media-assisted methods in literary pedagogy proves to be particularly effective when engaging with students who learn at different paces. For instance, the 1987 TV series *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1987) broadened appreciation of Achebe's work and affirmed Africans' capacity to produce and share knowledge in both written and visual forms, once regarded as the prerogative of Western civilisation. For effective literary experience in contemporary African learning institutions, the written literature which is the tier one level of literary literacy should be strictly seconded by the Media- Assisted Method.

Using a Media-Assisted Method, we look beyond the affordances of learning management systems and their communication tools in a contemporary university classroom, such as asynchronous resources, discussion boards and chats. The Media-Assisted Method caters to diverse learning styles and uses multimedia's power to enhance comprehension and retention. Digital storytelling, in conjunction with audiobooks and documentaries, becomes a valuable tool in prompting students to reassess and critically reconsider the prevalent and evolving representations of Africa. Educators should incorporate a multimodal approach to create an immersive learning environment, which is highly relevant in the current push for digital Humanities. For example, they can assign students an in-class exercise that focuses on assessing narratives portraying Africa on various online spaces such as *TikTok, X,* and *Meta,* and analysing their authenticity and biases. The overarching goal is to ensure that when students encounter African epistemic materials across contemporary media spaces, their visual experiences actively challenge internalised stereotypes and promote a gradual, reflective process of learning. The same principle applies to students of Political Science and

Development Studies, who stand to gain extensively from the full utilisation of interactive media.

African-Author-Philosophy Method

The African-Author-Philosophy Method positions every literary production by an African writer as a potential solution to African snags. African literature is primarily utilitarian in its orientation and narrative structure. The latter is the case because of the enormity of despoliation performed by the erstwhile Western colonisers. This entails studying traditional literary forms such as myths, legends, folk tales, fables, invocative poetry, heroic poetry, dirges or elegies, rituals, masquerades, war songs, and praise poetry from different parts of Africa. Indeed, many African writers are socially committed to the mission of liberating Africa from the shackles of Western epistemic violence and colonialism. Authorial philosophy also enable students to read literary texts to identify and unpack the solutions a writer proposes to African problems, whether past or contemporary. This method distracts the mind of the reader away from the Eurocentric characteristics in the text that prove misleading and misrepresenting.

The decolonising consciousness is important because it directly addresses the psychological trauma and cognitive dissonance inflicted on the colonised subjects who are forced to internalise a sense of inadequacy while simultaneously struggling to conform to an identity that is not their own (Treacher, 2005). The method umpires the student's subjectivities and prepares them, psychologically to believe that the African literary text is imbued with the African philosophy of patriotism and togetherness. For instance, Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), is better understood with this African-Author-Philosophy Method. The reader first sees Achebe as a writer on a decolonisation mission from the cautionary note of the title *Things Fall Apart*. This cautionary metaphor in the title is then expatiated in the narrative of the novel.

The method also dispels nationalist subjectivities which are likely to hamper a seamless and broad solution-based interpretation of an African literary text. To see Achebe, a Nigerian writer, first as an African ultimately helps the African reader who could be Kenyan, South African, Ghanaian, Zimbabwean, or Algerian to see *Things Fall Apart* (1958) as a story about Africa and Africans. Similarly, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is most effectively interpreted using the same approach. The reader sees Dangarembga as an African writer, who embarks on a protest mission to expose and challenge the intersectional layers of oppression, highlighting how African women's struggles are compounded by both gender and societal inequalities. By and large, the Author-Philosophy Method helps the reader to localise or situate African stories within their own contexts which invariably unravel the cultural correspondences and subtle tinges which achieve the sole aim of productive criticism.

In a classroom situation where a lecturer wishes to teach their students a text whose focus is on the representation of Africa in Western media, the lecturer could ask the students to create an imagined context of media representation of Africa and Africans. The lecturer asks them what they think about the way Africa is represented in many Western media. The students' answers might variably indicate that many Western media portray Africa and Africans as a place and people that lack robust mental capacity, progressive thinking, democratic culture, scientific innovations, honesty, social capital, cleanliness, technological drive and development and so on. This wrong portraiture becomes the problem. Then, the lecturer might proceed to ask the students to juxtapose their feedback on the Western portrayal of Africa as a place of backwardness with their portrayal of the West as a place of prosperity, modernity and progressive ideas.

Subsequently, the lecturer could invite a student to come forward. The student volunteer will then be introduced to the class as an imagined African author, tasked with writing a piece of fiction that addresses the disturbing representations discussed. The lecturer prompts the class to envision the

student as the specific writer of the text under scrutiny. During the class discussion, students propose solutions to the negative portrayal of Africa that the experimental author might address in their work. They are then instructed to approach the focused literary text with the mindset that the student-author is providing solutions to the issue of poor Western media representation of Africa discussed in class. As they explore the literary text, their focus extends beyond its entertainment value alone to its utilitarian function as conceived by the African author. It is worth noting that the African-Author-Philosophy Method differs from the Self-Mirror Method; it centres on the author as a writer, a social surgeon, scholar, political scientist, and philosopher. Scholars and students of Political Science focusing on Africa can utilise this method to explore the political philosophies and decolonisation efforts of prominent African leaders using auto/biographies of Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta and Robert Mugabe, amongst others.

Instructional Synergy: Bridging Educational Boundaries

Towards the end of the second semester, we prompted students to participate in an in-depth discussion by asking them what constitutes a good representation of Africa and what elements it should include. This exercise went beyond simply summarising their learning; it was a vital part of our pedagogical strategy to facilitate critical thinking and self-reflection. Firstly, this question pushed students to synthesise the diverse perspectives and materials that they had encountered throughout the course. Examining different representations, whether from literature, film, social media, or news outlets, enabled students to identify common stereotypes and misrepresentations. This comparison allowed them to critically assess how these portrayals influence global perceptions of Africa and Africans. Secondly, the question encouraged students to articulate their own visions and versions of an authentic and respectful representation of Africa.

They discussed the importance of highlighting Africa's diversity, rich cultural heritage, and contemporary

achievements, rather than perpetuating the narrow negative narratives seen in mainstream media. This part of the discussion was necessary to empower students to think beyond the passive consumption of media and consider how they might contribute to accurate and positive portrayals of their continent. Moreover, asking this question at the end of the semester helped to reinforce the Flipped Classroom model's emphasis on participatory learning and student involvement. Students were actively involved in constructing knowledge and developing critical perspectives, rather than passively receiving information. They were encouraged to draw on their own experiences, making the learning process personal and meaningful. Evidently, such a question challenged students to become critical consumers of media and proactive agents of change.

Grappling with what constitutes a good representation of Africa helps students question dominant narratives and to appreciate the complexity and richness of their own cultures. This, in turn, equips them with the critical tools necessary to navigate and challenge the biased and superficial portrayals of Africa in mainstream media. We exchanged our epistemic observations as educators, which remarkably enhanced our understanding of diverse learning strategies and pedagogical approaches. This exchange formed a fundamental comparative exercise that highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of our respective teaching methods. Firstly, we recognised that the Flipped Classroom model allowed us to cover substantially greater ground than traditional lecture-based approaches. The revelation became particularly striking when we compared our experiences at different universities, and the comparative perspective revealed an intriguing paradox. Even though the Flipped Classroom model facilitated greater content coverage and deeper interaction, it also inundated us with new information and insights from our students. This duality was both overwhelming and enlightening. On one hand, it challenged our preconceived notions and forced us to confront the vastness of our students' media consumption and its impact on their learning. On the other hand, it expanded our pedagogical

toolkit, equipping us with new strategies to foster critical thinking and cultural awareness. Moreover, our comparative analysis highlighted the varying degrees of familiarity and comfort that students had with different media. At Chrisland University, the integration of *TikTok* videos and *YouTube* content provided a contemporary, relatable context for discussing stereotypes and cultural representation. In contrast, students at Rhodes University initially gravitated towards Hollywood's problematic portrayals of Africa but gradually began to critique these representations with increasing sophistication. This cross-institutional dialogue heightened our understanding of how different contexts shape active learning and emphasised the necessity of adapting our teaching strategies to meet the unique needs of our students. It became clear that while the Flipped Classroom model is universally beneficial in promoting active learning, its implementation must be context-sensitive to maximise its impact.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our comparative exchange of epistemic reflections highlighted the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the Flipped Classroom. These epistemic reflections revealed how this model enhanced our pedagogical effectiveness and also challenged us to continuously learn from our students. This process of mutual enlightenment is essential for championing an inclusive and critical education that respects and utilises the diverse cultural backgrounds and media literacies of our students. However, this study does not intend to advocate for a radical pan-African or continental epistemic awareness that isolates the African education system from the rest of the world in response to the disruptive influence of Western colonialism.

Instead, the impetus behind the search for active learning pedagogies aims to re-engineer the African literary knowledge system, reflecting the unique African personhood, cultural diversity, civilisation, dynamism, and innovation. Such is an imperative that should not be trivialised by the educators and learners of African literature. Educators are able to initiate this transformative process by employing epistemic reflections as

a proactive practice in education, enabling them to dismantle sanctioned ignorance. A vital starting point in transforming how we teach the subject of Africa in the Humanities is incorporating new teaching strategies, diversifying instructional materials, and creating an inclusive curriculum, which are essential steps in this educational transformation. This chapter has shown the importance of embracing multiple perspectives to achieve a comprehensive understanding of Humanities education. Fundamentally, knowledge-making is not singular or fixed; rather, it emerges through the interplay of diverse viewpoints, highlighting the need for approaches that recognise complexity and contest assumptions. Insisting on a single perspective dismisses the possibility of other viewpoints that could be in play. However, acknowledging diverse narratives allowed us to move beyond the limitations of a single story, encouraging an accurate, empowering, historically grounded, and culturally informed representation of Africa. It also drew on Paulo Freire's (2005) Dialogic Education and Critical Pedagogy to foreground epistemic hybridity and multivocality as resources for teaching about Africa in ways that resist misrepresentation. This approach treated the classroom as a space of dialogue that encouraged students to interrogate and repudiate stereotypes embedded in dominant discourses. The epistemic reflections further highlighted the efficacy of the Flipped Classroom model in empowering students to question received knowledge, counter disinformation, and construct authentic understandings of African realities.

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