Integrating African Indigenous Education in the Curriculum: A Learning Curve for South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Even though Western education is indispensable and became a game changer, its adoption in the mainstream education system (curriculum) has substantially strained the passing of relevant skills, values, and knowledge to most African communities. The adoption of Western education was not tailored to the context, realities, and needs of most indigenous communities. The popular and accepted Western education has been applauded for preparing graduates who mostly look for employment, do not resonate with their realities and environment, and can barely create jobs with the acquired education. Unlike indigenous education, which prepared the young ones to face their immediate future realities and contribute to the development of the community, Western education seems far from equipping Africans to understand themselves and their surroundings. Grounded in the African Renaissance, this paper explores African indigenous education in a bid to draw lessons from it. To achieve this, a conceptual paper is framed from a review of literature on Google scholar, DHET accredited journals, Scopus, and other relevant credited sources. The paper does not seek to undermine the importance and value of Western education in the curriculum but advocates for the adoption of indigenous education to bring positive impact to African societies. Collaborative efforts are recommended for the revival, adoption, and continuation of indigenous education without looking at it as inferior.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous education; Western education; skills; knowledge; realities; curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

The authors' interest in the adoption of African indigenous education began when we started lecturing the Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (BIKSs). Having been taught and educated under the Western system, we felt the things we were taught from primary school to the doctorate level reflected little regarding Africa and its values. In other words, besides being employed by someone, we could hardly convert our knowledge into something tangible within our community. This is because the Western-based education that formed the basis of the curriculum did not capture much of the African values and needs (Mamphiswana & Noyoo, 2000). It is our humble view that it prepared us to be ready for employment and to serve other people. Our opportunity to lecture IKSs unearthed how much we were detached from Africa and using indigenous ways to find African solutions. Having been baptized in this African indigenous education and as new converts, we accept that our objectivity was somehow clouded, hence our endeavor to promote African indigenous education. Having to see some of our graduates venturing into starting indigenous restaurants and various indigenous entrepreneurs made us advocates for the infusion of African indigenous education in the mainstream in a bid to make qualifications resonate with the challenges faced in Africa. As such, the write-up was not specific about a subject, module, or degree. It embraced all qualifications in general, thereby giving generalized narratives. The generalized view was indispensable for now to set a roadmap before venturing into specifics.

Background

Indigenous education is openly defined by the authors to mean informal relevant skills, experiences, values, and knowledge used by African communities to construe their realities within their environment (Bhuda, 2021; Seroto, 2011). Indigenous education passed from one generation to another orally and through experience was subjugated during the colonial era when formal education was introduced. Indigenous education is hailed for its deep entrenched teachings on practical things that promote prosperity using locally available resources.

We the authors argue that the formal Western education system is fundamental but to some extent diametrically opposed to the needs of Africans. African indigenous skills and knowledge that empowered its products to sustain were excluded in the formal education. Some graduates from the formal education system are unemployed and doing nothing, as opposed to those who were homeschooled in indigenous education and are running indigenous enterprises (Moerane, 2016; Reyhner & Eder, 2017). This made the authors rigorously probe the likely results indigenous education can produce if infused in formal education. The harnessing of African indigenous education is indispensable and makes more sense than throwing it in the dustbin in preference for an education that is foreign and does not address or resonate with day-to-day realities of sustainable livelihood.

Since time immemorial, indigenous education was cherished and was at the core of all African societies in preparing the younger generations for their tomorrow. Various institutions within the African setup were designed to ensure community of what they were taught and

what they would be doing at home and in the community (Lekoko & Modise, 2011). This alone showed the relevance of indigenous education within the community. Beyond doubt, African indigenous education gave direction to community development and had a close attachment to the life lived in the indigenous communities. The success of the life of the indigenous communities is accredited to the congruencies of the indigenous education and the lived lifestyle of communities (Tharakan, 2015). Extrapolating from the latter, the authors argue that indigenous education sufficiently prepares the young generation for experiences that they encounter daily.

With the advent of colonialism, indigenous education was discarded in preference for Western education (Ramadikela et al., 2020). Indigenous education was replaced by Western education and administered to Indigenous people to prepare them for a life within their indigenous communities. The authors argue that this was paralysis of analysis. Why would non-Westerners be trained with Western education for life within indigenous communities? This is devious, damaging, and creates useless people who cannot give any palliatives to the community in which they live. This can be argued to be the perpetuation of colonialism. Such an educational system is meant to alienate Indigenous peoples from their heritage and their existence (Brock-Utne, 2002; Hammar et al. 2021; Situmorang et al., 2021). Infusing the African values and norms within the curriculum offers the opportunity to bridge this gap. The authors have observed that the perpetuation of such a system in the education arena has midwifed a current generation that scorns and belittles Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as a degree program or modules.

The authors advocate for the infusing of indigenous education in the mainstream of education in a bid to honor and preserve indigenous knowledge and to harvest the practical solutions it brings. It is envisaged that its adoption will harness inclusive teaching and learning that bolsters holistic learning in all its facets. Consequently, it is expected to boost pride among Indigenous Africans, as they will cherish their roots and routes. Non-indigenous Africans will also be exposed to new forms of learning and restore dignity and mutual respect to Indigenous South Africans.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The African Renaissance theory advocates reviving past values and norms in order to apply them in current and future endeavors (Rabaka, 2022). This theory was popularized by the former president of South Africa, Mr. Thabo Mbeki, who primarily drove the education agenda to restore the African mind to its sane state and discourage brain drain. Such a move was rooted in glorifying African heritage and adopting it in every facet of life. In so doing, President Mbeki adopted it as a political philosophy to overcome corruption and lawlessness on the African continent (Mekoa, 2018). Against this backdrop, we argue for the restoration of African education, as we strongly believe that it is worthy of reviving, preserving, and continuing in this age to harness its strength. This will give value to education as learners and students become

able to bring palliatives to their environments. We argue for the African values, norms, and traditions that promote Ubuntu and foster development. Any negative forms that were associated in some practices are not advocated for in our quest for revival. In the famous speech of President Mbeki, the following were key factors in the African Renaissance: growth, social cohesion, and economic rebuilding (Muxe Nkondo, 2007).

We have come to the realization that the advent of colonization and apartheid in South Africa jeopardized African indigenous education. Even though Africans fought for their freedom and independence, it is argued that the so-called "freedom and independence" is a dream, as the colonially established systems of education and Constitution directly and/or indirectly control African values and the norms of African Indigenous peoples. As it stands, African indigenous education is currently marginalized and is on the verge of extinction because of the socio-economic transformation that has been perpetrated under the veil of democracy (Pietersen & Plaatjies, 2023; Samkange et al., 2021). In a bid to restore African indigenous education in South Africa, the authors use the African Renaissance theory. This paper drives the narrative to revive African indigenous education so that children and societies can be empowered to use indigenous solutions to address local challenges while having a global outlook.

African indigenous education skillfully weaves themes across various disciplines such as education, child-rearing, governance, conservation, heritage, and development. The potency and quality of this education is a testament to the great smiths, potters, hunters, weavers, and medicine men that produced prolific and outstanding outputs. A generous look at African indigenous education products reveals variety, flexibility, and practical dexterity, as evidenced by the various experts within the surviving African spaces. With these things on the verge of extinction, we provide a different narrative of African indigenous education with the intention to advocate for its revival within the mainstream of education. We stress that its revival is indispensable and should not be viewed as inferior but be apportioned the respect and honor it deserves.

African Indigenous Education (AIE)

To start, the authors explored the meaning and understanding of African indigenous education. Based on the influence of Western education on our thought patterns, it is a mammoth task to find unanimous agreement on what constitutes African indigenous education. One can argue that it is impossible to obtain an unadulterated African indigenous education because of the colonialism and apartheid so long in place. Nonetheless, critical issues can be unveiled and agreed upon that include the philosophy and practices of African Indigenous peoples. The ability to coin these tenets will illuminate that which can be vouched to mean African indigenous education. This section thus unearths what constitutes African indigenous education (AIE).

Quan-Baffour (2006) defines African indigenous education as "The transmission of relevant knowledge, skills and values usually to the younger members of society to enable them fit into their respective communities" (p. 464). Extrapolating from this quote, it is critical to note

that this form of education was not formally documented. Also critical was the fact that it was mainly targeted to the younger members to be able to copy community norms based on their experiences. We opine that experience produced education for African indigenous communities and it was relevant for their survival and livelihood. Thus, hunter, warrior, potter, goldsmith, and others were specialized careers that were goal specific. The advent of the Western education system sought to alter the status quo by converting Indigenous people to offer them services (Mackenzie, 1993), a serious downgrade that divorced them from sustaining themselves with their environments. Against this backdrop, the authors outline the characteristics attached to African indigenous education in support of those presented by Mbiti (1989):

- It is not individualistic;
- It is both formal and informal;
- It is closely knitted to the social and cultural life;
- It embraces both the physical and metaphysical aspects; and
- It is not static but conforms to the changes (environmental, emotional, physical, and mental).

The authors draw attention to the unique characteristics listed above and show that African indigenous education (AIE) focused on molding one's career, orientating oneself to community life holistically with all necessary responsibilities for the sustainability of self, others, and the environment. AIE bakes in a legal subject of integrity and who possesses fundamental skills for survival of self, the community, and the environment. It was never meant to prepare one to be a servant and/or worker of another but to champion life (Mdhluli et al., 2021). AIE is arguably said to be community-oriented and never designed to ignite competition but complement others.

In its conceptualization, one was forever learning. To Indigenous peoples, life and education are inseparable. Years of accumulated tested experience become the traditions, values, and norms of the community. These outcomes are then passed down through practical teachings and word of mouth (Daswa et al., 2018). It ought to be highlighted that AIE is holistic in nature and cannot be reduced to categorizations of being practical, theoretical, and spiritual. It embraces all these, and they operate as one entity. The advent of the Western education system discombobulated AIE as it sought to create cheap labor for their advantage (Bassey, 1999). Nevertheless, the emergence of Afrocentricity, Sankofaism, and the African Renaissance have advocated for the adoption of practical skills, knowledge, and values in the mainstream education system to bring value to the education offered to children who cannot create their own solutions to the communities but rely on being employed. Such a bold move is birthed from the narrative that Africans are being taught foreign concepts that do not yield authentic results in the unique environments, thus relooking at their indigenous philosophy to recalibrate solutions that are fit and proper.

The Integration of Indigenous and Modern Education

The 21st century has witnessed the rise of a movement toward integrating indigenous and modern education. Such a move is credited to various scholars who propound diverse contestations on how Western education and epistemologies were and are dominating syllabi (Breidlid, 2013; Dube et al., 2022; Odora Hoppers, 2002). According to Dei (2000), such dominance of Western epistemologies in African spaces undermines the rights of African Indigenous peoples and is a direct violation of laws and policies that recognize and protect marginalized and minority groups. Such injustice directly challenges the Constitutional imperatives of redressing past injustices. This discussion came to light when it seemed there was agreement on the importance and significance of indigenous education in almost all sectors. Integration and/or inclusion is envisaged to yield both positive and negative results. However, there is also a thorny issue: How will this integration and/or inclusion be done? Against this backdrop, we critique the integration of indigenous and modern education.

Our first concern when it comes to the proposed integration and/or inclusion is the formation of a uniform curriculum that will embrace all Indigenous peoples in South Africa. Indigenous peoples are composed of diverse, unique, and distinct cultural values within a geographical location. For instance, the Tsongas, Venda, and Pedi speakers can share a geographical community but subscribe to different values. Integration and/or inclusion of such indigenous knowledge in one school would be a massive task. This does not merely affect the curriculum but requires the teacher to be well-versed in many different knowledge systems to in order to cater to all learners. Nonetheless, we argue that even though there is this diversity that seems complex, it is doable. Diversity does not mean disunity.

Second, since the colonial time, African indigenous knowledge has been demonized and labelled as archaic, primitive, and backward by the colonial masters who sought to propagate their own knowledge and exploit Africans (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). Throughout the colonial and apartheid times, African Indigenous peoples were subjected to psychological torture as they were coerced to accept Western education, which was then used as a standard of intelligence and access to provisions. Coming to the issue of integration and/or inclusion, some Indigenous peoples still have trust issues, and this move could be the final nail in the coffin. There is likely to be contestation by Indigenous peoples who wish to maintain their self-determination and do not want to see a dilution of their knowledge (Lâm, 2000).

Third, we opine that it is difficult to reach a unanimous decision regarding the integration and/or inclusion of African indigenous education in the mainstream of education. African indigenous knowledge holders believe that some indigenous knowledge is sacrosanct, secret, and cannot be shared with outsiders or other genders (Kugara et al., 2021). Allowing such knowledge to be put in the open is a double jeopardy, as this violates ancestral obligations. Reflecting on the way that indigenous knowledge had been appropriated for financial gain by unscrupulous people, trust has already been lost (Pert et al., 2020). Some African indigenous

knowledge holders are of the view that Western educational systems are cunning and can be springboards to decimate the only remaining pride for African indigenous communities. African indigenous knowledge is holistic in nature (Tshamano et al., 2023), and there is much of it that contradicts the scientific, which is a major stronghold that stands to challenge the transmission of indigenous education. Ancestral values and belief systems are part of it. Such knowledge is viewed with skepticism and doubted by a Western worldview lens, yet it is meant for Africans and for African use.

Finally, what complicates this integration and/or inclusion further is the way teaching is conducted in formal schools. African indigenous education has a mode of transmission of knowledge that is likely to be resisted. The structure and physical setup of Western classrooms will have to be collapsed and/or changed to suit African indigenous education. Otherwise, it will be a shame and dehumanizing to adopt Western methods to teach and assess African indigenous education. Outdoor setups and activities that conform to African indigenous education will have to be adopted. The question is whether this will be advocated and promoted when nowadays people are more concerned with the safety of the children and do not prepare them for such. We submit that failure to understand and capture the essence of such indispensable components for African indigenous education will be a big compromise and undermine it. This will be failing to embrace and harness interculturalism, an element that is fundamental for integration and/or inclusion. This calls for the stakeholders to be actively involved in establishing such a critical and complex composition.

It should be made clear that this process of integration and/or inclusion is not child's play and shall require patience, collaboration, openness, and resilience, as they are real hurdles that can block such a stupendous initiative. African indigenous education and Western education are founded on different worldviews and complex epistemologies hinged on different social, cultural, historical, and political positionalities. Stoer and Cortesão (1999) submit that viewing this web of diverging and delicate matter calls for both indigenous and international perspectives to form an intercultural dialogue.

Modernizing Education While Maintaining Cultural Integrity

We recognize that it is complicated to modernize education while keeping cultural integrity intact, to promote contemporary practices of education (including the usage of modern tools) on the African indigenous launchpad. This entails the hiring of African indigenous knowledge holders to teach some practices in a classroom. On the other hand, it means taking students to African indigenous setups for them to assimilate the cultural practices. As that is not enough, institutions ought to be flexible in terms of their assessment policies to allocate marks for certain practices that Western-based education disregards. In that regard, the authors suggest the following in embracing modern education while maintaining cultural integrity:

- **Integration of indigenous knowledge**

The better way that the authors deem fit to modernize education while maintaining cultural integrity is to integrate indigenous knowledge into the curriculum. The inclusion of indigenous

language, practices, and values in the curriculum smooths the way. Such a move to integrate can be initiated within degrees, subjects, and modules wherein indigenous knowledge carries valuable insights. It is fundamental to comprehend the roots and routes of the Indigenous peoples of South Africa to have understanding how the suzerain education affected them by pushing their practices and values away. Integrating indigenous knowledge would be judicious in redressing past injustices and imbalances.

- **Orientation and training of lecturers and teachers**

One watershed challenge we encountered when we were teaching IKSs was that the lecturers were thinking and reasoning from the Western perspective. This was because we were trained in a Western system, so trying to adopt the African way seemed strange and wicked. The best way to navigate this is to have lecturers and teachers trained with relevant knowledge and skills to allow integration of indigenous views. A workshop on cultural sensitivity is critical to acknowledge and appreciate diverse backgrounds of indigenous groups. A new way of training lecturers and teachers in the teaching of an integrated curriculum ought to be developed.

- **Involvement of indigenous knowledge holders in the community**

African indigenous knowledge has been demonized and misrepresented, and this has resulted in it becoming extinct. Against this backdrop, there is a need for involvement of indigenous knowledge holders in the community to assist curriculum developers with fundamental issues to include in the curriculum. Just like experts are given remuneration for such tasks, traditional health care practitioners, indigenous singers, potters, and others indigenous knowledge holders ought to come on board to perform such roles with similar benefits.

- **Incorporating indigenous education**

In addition to the supposedly global languages, students and learners need to be taught using their indigenous languages. Such a move holds water in decolonizing the mentality of the students and learners while restoring and preserving indigenous languages in the modern dynamic world. It is argued that indigenous languages give precise and concise expression of their culture; thus, eliminating the language entails eliminating the cultural norms and values. We argue that some of the colonial narratives of citing African names when referring to peasant farmers and people of low life and/or criminals ought to be reviewed to generate a thinking that Africans matter and that they can do anything that is good and above average. The use of indigenous languages also makes it easy for learners to capture concepts easily without struggling with the language first.

- **Promulgation of statutes and policies**

As a way of buttressing the above, there is a need to promulgate statutes and policies that provide a roadmap for the adoption and preservation of indigenous knowledge within the system of education. Such initiatives need funding and resources. There should be academic notice of how colonial education was propagated and spread. The colonial and apartheid government controlled the thinking of Africans by deliberately passing statutes and policies that suppressed African indigenous education. The mere fact that there are major determinants of

education needs to be taken into consideration. These determinants (social, political, etc.) should be the driving force to give a roadmap to the statutes and policies. Thus, the African indigenous aspirations should find expression in these statutes and policies so that they become deliverable. The South African government policy must therefore push for South Africans to be taught in their indigenous languages at institutions. Such a push by the government ought to align the South African products of education to partner with their ideological beliefs, which resonates with their environmental realities. Through this, the education that was used to suppress South Africans will be reviewed to become a tool to elevate them.

Efforts for the Continuation of African Indigenous Education

African indigenous education has been in existence since time immemorial, and there is therefore a need and a desire for continuance. For its continuance, collaborative efforts are key to confront hindrances that have been established over the years. Key among these roadblocks is to ascertain whether African indigenous education was commonly accepted, proper, and can still be structured. Against this backdrop is the surgical attack on African thought by colonizers who peddled a narrative that they came to civilize dark Africa, which was said to be primitive (Abodohoui, 2022). The mere fact that there was no chronologically written diary of African indigenous education forms the basis of colonial opposition to it (Odora Hoppers, 2021). Contrary to this form of codification, indigenous forms were used to preserve knowledge: proverbs, folklore, indigenous games, stories, etc. (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014; Makeleni et al., 2023; Nevhudoli & Olive Netshandama, 2023).

From the above submissions, the authors argue that there are abundant sources of African indigenous education. Appraising collaborative efforts for its continuance entail rigorously looking at the following:

- **Collaborative efforts by diverse stakeholders**

The authors argue that there is a need to bring diverse fundamental stakeholders to harness their collaborative efforts to foster continuation of African indigenous education. Key stakeholders include African indigenous communities and governmental, non-governmental, and academic institutions. A critical look at the stakeholders shows that African indigenous communities top the list, as they are the victims who desire to have their education system preserved and set to be passed on to future generations through formal systems of education. Their desired hopes can find expression through legislation, policy, funding, curricular incorporation, and advocacy.

- **Envisaged challenges**

It is prudent that any collaborative efforts to allow continuation of African indigenous education be handled carefully because of the horrendous past that may attract distrust among the African indigenous knowledge holders. Colonial rule inflicted psychological torture through its policies that ensured the decimation of African indigenous knowledge. As such, allowing foreign means and strategies that once dehumanized them to come in as a savior leaves much to be desired. This could easily be seen as a jackpot to financially exploit Africans using their resources.

Additionally, this could be viewed as a legitimate way of selling off their intellectual property rights. In the recent past, it was taboo and irrational to document African indigenous knowledge systems as they were regarded demonic and archaic. This established view is a stumbling block and a thought that makes one suspicious of surreptitious motives. This hatches the idea that "African issues must be addressed by African people." Conceived in this statement is that Africans understand their issues, are not judgmental, and have Africa at heart in such engagements. Nevertheless, the idea of bringing in an outsider brings objectivity. To map a way forward in such a convoluted scenario, there is the need to have an open-door policy to bring in outsiders who are fully aware of the pre-colonial era and the position that the colonizers of the time had in mind when they quashed African indigenous education.

The authors perceive the thorny issue of cultural mismatch between African indigenous education and the Western-oriented education system. This mismatch will breed tension, anger, and resentment in the process, as some things that are not regarded as important will be thrown away and some polished to meet so-called Western standards. It is an open secret that current African studies scholars are products of Western education, including the current authors. The direct Western influence on African indigenous education must be cautioned, as it will perpetuate colonial rule as their objectivity is questioned. A new African indigenous worldview is critical to see the rationality and logic of African issues. Failure to do this will place magnifying glasses on the scholar; they will major the minor, minor the major, and be engulfed in prejudices and frustrations of trying to employ parochial logical reasoning. That will not work. Working with genuine African indigenous knowledge holders, as discussed above, will bring sanity to capturing the philosophical underpinnings of Africans before colonization.

One must be open-minded to see the preservation of culture, empowerment of the indigenous communities, and equity in education that will be brought about by a genuine collaborative endeavor. Such positivity in the outcome ought to supersede the diverse challenges that will be witnessed in the process. Mutual understanding, respect, and trust are the sure vehicles that can enhance this initiative.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis, it may be noted that the integration and/or inclusion of African indigenous education is envisaged to positively impact African societies. This journey will rejuvenate the abandoned history, awaken unity and a sense of pride, and empower the recipients to sustain their livelihood. Besides a change in the educational trajectory, the social fabric of the African indigenous communities will be enriched, thereby giving diversity and building an invisible bond with non-indigenous Africans. However, such a noble move is not going to be easy to execute as there are real and delicate compromises that will have to be attended to. Collaborative efforts are recommended for the revival, adoption, and continuation of indigenous education without looking at African indigenous education as inferior. Even though African indigenous education is being advocated to be integrated and/or included in the

curriculum, it needs meticulous attention to ensure that it is designed to foster entrepreneurial skills that are aligned to the modern dynamic world so as to inspire students and learners to create relevant opportunities that will create sustainable employment and solutions.

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