

RESEARCHING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE (IK) IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) discourses are confronted by several challenges ranging from methodological, attitudinal, political and financial in nature, yet IK's agency in 21st century Africa and beyond cannot be doubted. In this article, we show that although a small number of academics are actively engaging in Indigenous Knowledge (IK) research, there remains limited support from other stakeholders along the IK value chain. The data were gathered through in-depth interviews with IK scholars, a review of relevant literature, and informal discussions with colleagues. The data was collated into a narrative and content analysis was used to analyse it. This article made the thesis that a handful of academia in Zimbabwe is doing commendable research on IK but the missing link is that their efforts are not complemented by stakeholders for communities to sustainably benefit from research. There must be "ringed funding" towards IK and a seamless chain of flow of research output from the researchers to the policy makers, implementors and the

public as the end users of that information. The connecting cogs in this value chain are conspicuously not connecting.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, higher education, academia, Education 5.0, Vision 2030.

INTRODUCTION

Researching indigenous knowledge (IK) in Zimbabwe, and Africa by extension, is inundated by a myriad of challenges such as African scholars using Western lenses when they design and conduct studies in African indigenous knowledge systems (Bhuda and Koitsiwe 2022; Kaya and Seleti 2013). A close examination of this situation has revealed that it is because the African scholars themselves were educated through the western education system hence to date in most African countries the education system has been fully decolonised (Sithole and Bondai, 2020). Therefore, notwithstanding the agency of IK, its mainstreaming into higher education has remained a mere talk show in recent decades without effective implementation by African scholars (Banda 2013; Hlatywayo 2017; Sithole and Bondai 2020). To date, scholars have concluded that academia is working as lone rangers with little collaborative support from other sectors on researching indigenous knowledge (Dei 2000; Doxtater 2004; Nyden 2003). This is unhealthy situation in a country like Zimbabwe where value chains are cardinal for the realisation of Vision 2030 and Education 5.0 Policy. The Vision 2030 and Education 5.0 Policy are national development blueprints meant to modernise and industrialise the Zimbabwean economy to an upper middle-income economy by the year 2030.

Education 5.0 policy is a heritage-based education philosophy. Heritage refers to the natural endowments of Zimbabwe; flora, fauna, water, minerals, science and technology system that can be used to produce goods and services useful for the economy based on this heritage (Zivanayi, n.d). In other words, Education 5.0 policy is meant for teachers at all levels of the education system to impart knowledge which is suitable and relevant through utilisation of locally available socio-cultural resources. The thrust is that teaching and learning should focus on local environment and locally available materials to develop the economy based on such resources (Zivanayi, n.d). Put simply, the argument is that for Zimbabwe to achieve Vision 2030, its education system must be needs driven, culturally and contextually relevant. This can only be achieved through a heritage-based mindset where IK are an integral part of a people's education heritage.

Thus, this article argues that limited mainstreaming of researching IK in education, health, economy, politics and governance is largely due to weak complementarity and collaborative research efforts among the relevant stakeholders. Among other reasons, this situation arises

from conflicting viewpoints, towards not only the democratisation of higher education, but also the mainstreaming of researching and teaching indigenous knowledge in institutions of higher learning in Africa (Hammersmith 2007, Ndlovu and Masuku 2004). Academia's role in this trajectory needs policy support given the already marginalisation of IK across the various sectors of the economy partly because of colonialisation of local languages, and local knowledge systems in communities (Maditsi and Bhuda, 2023).

Contrary to Eurocentric literature that marginalises and delegitimises researching IK in Africa (Doxtater 2004, Ndlovu and Masuku 2004), we provide evidence that some members of academia in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning are doing their part in researching IK but are shortchanged by lack of collaborative or complementary efforts from other stakeholders (Risiro 2019). Our conviction is that stakeholders to the education sector should strengthen their commitment in this regard as envisioned in the country's Vision 2030 Agenda and Education 5.0 Policy. In other words, there is need for a seamless value chain in IK production by academia and the various stakeholders including its dissemination for use in the national development agenda.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNISING IK IN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education in Africa has been significantly impacted by the Eurocentric discourse. Kaya (2013) stated that this is demonstrated by the fact that Western researchers' work continues to be the primary source of social thought advancements. This implies that African higher education institutions have resorted to copying the ideas and methods of scientists in the West, including their theories and approaches to choosing the most important research problems (Maditsi and Bhuda 2023). This has resulted in African indigenous knowledge systems to be often perceived as archaic and unscientific; they receive less attention and are therefore not appropriate sources for the development of social theory and research. Alongside this is the incapacity of African academics to produce original definitions, theories, concepts, and research methodologies that could direct the intellectual advancement of their respective fields of study and research.

Thus, Bhuda and Marumo (2022) argue that decolonising higher education is necessary to restore the dignity of African people and their knowledge and allow for the inclusion of indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing in curricula. The arguments made by Bhuda and Marumo (2022) are consistent with those made by Kaya (2013), who wrote a study on IK in South African higher education and claimed that because AIKS were previously denigrated, their integration into higher education allows African students and educators to reevaluate the

inherent hierarchy of knowledge systems. Therefore, acknowledging the existence of different types of knowledge rather than a single, standard, benchmark system is necessary for their inclusion in the formal education systems, especially at the higher level.

In South Africa, successful attempts to integrate Indigenous Knowledge in the curriculum were made by The North-West University (NWU), the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), the University of Free State (UFS), the University of Venda (UNIVEN), the University of Limpopo (UL), the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the University of South Africa (UNISA) which are in partnership with the Department of Higher Education and the Department of Science and innovation (Mosemege 2005; Breidlid 2009; Kaya and Seleti 2013; Bhuda and Masenya 2025). Academic degrees in indigenous knowledge systems have been introduced by the North-West University and the University of Venda as proof of integration. Since indigenous knowledge systems are multidisciplinary, graduates of those academic programmes have since been produced and academics from diverse fields have been lecturers (Kaya and Seleti 2013). It is clear that South Africa is a pioneer to other African states on integrating indigenous knowledge in higher education and its successful attempts provided evidence on how education is continuously decolonised. Therefore, it is this study's argument that the examples provided above about South Africa can be used as model by Zimbabwe to integrate indigenous Knowledge Systems in its higher education system.

By incorporating indigenous knowledge into higher education as stated by Martinez-Vargas (2020), African students will be more equipped to contribute to the global corpus of knowledge. Mampane et al. (2018) indicated that this is noteworthy because, despite decades of self-rule, it is increasingly recognized that African researchers have not been able to help the continent construct its own theoretical and methodological framework for education that fosters knowledge generation and sustainable development. The study also argues that African researchers cannot be held accountable alone for not successfully promoting IK in higher education, but also African states should share some of the burden. African governments and their agencies have a responsibility to advance the use of native knowledge in research, teaching, and learning in higher education. When effectively implemented, the identification, acknowledgement, and usage of Indigenous Knowledge in Africa's sustainable development would benefit indigenous people in the present and the future (Bhuda 2021).

Moreover, the study argues that much has been written by IK and possible integration to higher education to less has been done to achieve that goal (Kaya and Seleti, 2013). Africans should therefore be reminded that incorporating their indigenous knowledge will benefit learners and students by making education more relevant and effective by giving them an education that is in line with their own innate perspectives, experiences, language, and customs

(Kante, 2004). Kante (2004) had an argument that IKS should interface with other knowledge systems is predicated on the ideas that doing so will advance cognitive fairness and help humanize western knowledge systems (Chabaya and Chabaya, 2023). The promotion of epistemic plurality through the incorporation of IKS in higher education can only be advantageous for the system. Human needs could become the central focus of higher education through the adoption of a holistic approach to knowledge generation and dissemination.

BACKGROUND

Research into indigenous knowledge is ubiquitous. It is generally agreed that indigenous knowledge is an edge-cutting form of knowing to the extent that even those opposed to it are beginning to admit its efficacy (Hlatywayo, 2017; Muyambo, 2018b; Sithole, 2014; Sithole, 2021). Despite decades of peripherisation and inferiorisation, IK has resurfaced with a surprising resurgence, especially in turbulent times such as in the eras of pandemics like COVID-19, HIV and AIDS, Ebola, and climate change induced environmental disasters like Cyclone Idai, just to mention a few. Despite the stark reality that IK is a people's form of knowing that communities have been using from time immemorial, very little is being done by at the macro level to mainstream indigenous knowledge into education, health, economy, environment, politics and governance in terms of policy formulation and implementation. In the context of Zimbabwe, this peripherisation of IK is evident. This is despite the fact that the 2018 introduced Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Zimbabwe primary and secondary education sector which provides for practical consideration and use of IK, let alone its recognition in the Zimbabwe Constitution (Amendment No.20) as well as in the 2021 – 2025 National Development Strategy 1(NDS1). More importantly, with the emphasis being placed on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), IK is an essential cog in the realisation of many agendas that Africa has set for itself to achieve such as Africa Vision 2030 where Zimbabwe aspires to be an upper-middle income economy, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Africa Agenda 2063.

On many fronts, academia, particularly in Zimbabwe, has been accused of not doing enough in terms of bringing out edge-cutting research in IK meant for the realisation of developmental agendas in Africa (Ndlovu and Masuku 2004, Risiro 2019, Sithole 2020). In response to this, the Zimbabwe Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development has changed the thrust from Education 3.0 to Education 5.0 where innovation and industrialisation have been co-joined to the traditional mandate of teaching, researching and providing university service to communities. The rationale for this shift is that universities, which have largely remained universities in Africa rather than

universities for Africa development (Mararike 2016, Kaya and Seleti 2013, Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b) are churning out goods and services that are not fit for purpose for Africa's transformation (National Skills Audit Report 2018). In fact, the goods and services are often diametrically opposed to what the consumers require, thereby creating a mismatch of what is produced and what is required by consumers. By shifting to Education 5.0, the envisaged outcome is that universities in Zimbabwe align to ESD and provide solutions to numerous development challenges that societies/communities face in the country and Africa as a whole. In our view, the promulgation of Education 5.0 in 2018 is an important development in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. Although studies on the effectiveness of Education 5.0 are still in their infancy, there are universities in Zimbabwe which are mainstreaming IK, for example, Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) has introduced a master's degree in IK. In addition to efforts by CUT, Great Zimbabwe University established a school named School of Heritage and Education whose focus is to advance the teaching and learning of heritage based modules like Indigenous knowledge and development which is taught in the school's department of Development Studies. These two universities, out of 18, are currently the ones who are making an effort to integrate IK which clearly shows that the level of integration is quite miniscule. To date, these attempts to bring to fore indigenous knowledge philosophy and programmes in Zimbabwe higher education have been less effective mainly because of the fact that there has not been a deliberate effort to train the administrators and teaching staff on curriculum redesign and integration of IK in Zimbabwe higher education. As for Zimbabwe the success is yet to be realised since the degree programme has just started but in the case of South Africa the teaching and learning of IK has resulted in shifts in curriculum as well as perceptions about IK, developments that are congruent with the "Africa we all want" mantra, an Africa that harnesses its IK for sustainable development, an inward looking for solutions rather than an outward looking for solutions in the face of challenges.

It is at this point that we strongly believe that although academia has its shortcomings in researching IK, it is doing its best within its mandate but lacks the support it desperately needs in researching for solutions to societal problems. This is what we intend to demonstrate in this article through delimiting our discussion to what academia has done on IK-related research as a possible solution to some of the challenges that African communities grapple with in their developmental endeavours. In fact, we will attempt to locate the missing link in the mainstreaming of IK into education, health, economy, politics, governance or development in general.

CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE: FROM WHENCE?

In order to put this discussion into proper context, we attempt to define IK with the intention not to sound too elitist as IK identifies with the local people, the grassroots. Let us admit here that IK is understood differently but for the purpose of this discussion, the definitions, or rather working definitions of IK offered here are Afrocentric. The reason for adopting this is more than obvious, it is the need to push this way of knowing from, what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b) calls, “the barbarian margins of society” back to the centre.

When we began writing this article, we debated whether or not to define IK. Kapoor and Shizha (2010, 2) have made it clear that “many would prefer not to define because after all, definition/taxonomies (and their rigidities) are a product/instrument of colonial administration and control...”. Producers and owners of IK seldom use the term “indigenous” when referring to their knowledge. This is because of the amorphous and corrupted tendencies in the way IK has become to be understood. However, after deep reflections on the subject, we decided to have some conceptualisations of IK for the purposes of clarity and relevance of the discussion on this subject matter. Chapungu and Sibanda (2015, 23) understand IK as “locally engineered ideas, practices and beliefs” which have “accumulated and passed over generations” and have been vital in responding to a plethora of development challenges for a particular socio-ecological context. This means that IK represents a people’s ingenuities as they deal with day-to-day life challenges across faculties of life like health, economic, political or cultural in nature. A few examples where IK has been evident include the use of specific plants as pesticides and medicines for livestock and human beings (Maroyi 2017; Mfengu 2021; Sithole 2020). In spiritual wellbeing, indigenous knowledge of worship is quite evident in most communities in Sub-Saharan Africa (Fonda 2011) while politics, governance and indigenous legal codification are normative practices of the traditional leaders in the Zimbabwe communities and in many African countries (Logan 2008; Musarandega, Chingombe, & Pillay, 2018). The intensity of documenting evidence of IK in use across communities is sufficient evidence that this is a matter that cannot be ignored even in higher education.

Dismissing IK as “superstition” (Ntuli 2002) is not only a westernised understanding of IK, but a racial, bigoted and self-conceited understanding of the other people’s ways of knowing, simply known as “othering”. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020, 370) advises that there is need “to shift the geopolitics of knowledge by using African endogenous knowledge and the epistemology of the Global South” to better understand development challenges and provide solutions within context. In the view of the author, the western knowledge that underlined development in Africa over the past 500 years and has plunged the continent into the current civilization crisis cannot be the same knowledge that free the African people out of the present

crisis into the future (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020). This assertion speaks to the fact that the value of IK is found in its localised, situatedness and culture-specific nature. In fact, it is folly to try and universalise knowledge for that is equivalent to knowledge genocide, where external knowledge system becomes the normative and supreme over the local one. No matter the perspective from which one tries to conceptualise IK, most scholars agree that IK incorporates the following three interconnected features (Kaya and Seleti ,2013; Mapara, 2009; Mararike, 2016; Sithole 2014; Bar-On 2015):

- IK is “local”. This denotes that it is specific and possibly unique to a particular geo-social locality, group of people, be they the original inhabitants of their place of residence or migrants.
- IK is “empirical” and “practical”, meaning that it is historical and draws from positive ongoing experiences, not theory. In other words, the community is the practical laboratory where its efficacy is found.
- IK is “shared”, such that “everyone” knows it, although some people probably are more knowledgeable than others due to socio-economic divisions of labour (for example, women being more conversant with child rearing than men) and other differential social factors like age and locality.

Notwithstanding the vilification of IK in the epistemic warfare between the Global North and the Global South, IK is an agent for a people’s relational existence and wellbeing. It is that which a people hold as quintessential in their lives that gives them meaning. In the next section we look at the lens that undergird this study and the methodology we adopted thereof in conducting the study.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AS A VEHICLE TO DECOLONISE AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION.

Higher education institutions of learning face a difficult decolonisation challenge because they are caught between the weight of neoliberal performativity in knowledge production and the colonized curriculum, which has troubling ramifications. Aware of this difficulty, Leibowitz (2017) asserted that the idea of a decolonised curriculum should not be a piecemeal process but rather a university-wide undertaking in which all parties are involved such as managers, academics, students, and leaders who should cooperate to change the underlying epistemologies of academic disciplines. But entrenched white supremacy, the African sense inferiority

complex, and the ongoing subjectivity of Africans highlight the difficulty for academics and Higher education institutions in decolonising curricula (Bhuda and Marumo 2022).

Decolonising higher education has to be seen as a process of recovering indigenous people's identities, languages, and experiences from the effects of colonialism (Datta 2018). Through policy and decolonised measures, indigenous communities can thus free themselves from the repressive authority of the colonizing state government (Simpson 2004). The assertion made by Adebisi (2016) that the goal of decolonisation is to center Africa in curriculum with regard to teaching and learning as well as content is instructive. It should be about Africans finding their own identities outside of whiteness and redefining who they are in connection to other people and the wider world. Therefore, scholars must utilise the resources provided to them to decolonise higher education and represent the African voices whose knowledge has been silenced in academic spaces. One way to decolonise indigenous knowledge in higher education would be to design a specific programme to train academics on indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies. This is important to re-orient them to the Afrocentric perspectives given that they themselves are products of Western epistemologies and pedagogies. Another practical way is for the institutions of higher education to deliberately collaborate with indigenous communities for knowledge production and integration into the higher education system (Lin et al. 2021). Furthermore, the institutions of higher education can establish and sustain a fund to support students to conduct research in indigenous knowledge for their dissertations and a strong institutional support system like policies as also argued by Kaya and Seleti (2013), Masenya (2022) and Bhuda (2025).

Le Grange (2018) study highlights how the author in his 2016 article drew on Chilisa's (2012) five steps of the decolonisation process to explore what decolonising the higher education curriculum may entail. Rediscovery and recovery; mourning; dreaming; commitment and action are a few of these. Le Grange (2018) emphasises most on Rediscovery and recovery, which is a process whereby colonized peoples rediscover and recover their own history, culture, language, and identity are afforded by using indigenous knowledge as a means of decolonising the curriculum. A decolonised curriculum should, take into account the African context and reality and acknowledge the contributions of Africans to all the academic fields such as philosophy, language etc. It is the integration of African silenced/unheard voices into higher education (Le Grange 2016).

Emeagwali (2020) argued that since decolonisation entails promoting Indigenous ideas and challenging the predominance of Western thought, it is a component of indigenization. Indigenization is a part of reconciliation since it involves creating new relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Martinez-Vargas 2020). Thus, this research contends

that the goal of indigenization is to acknowledge the sovereignty of Indigenous people, whose erasure supports and encourages colonialism. Indigenization moves the emphasis away from colonial power in an effort to elevate and respect Indigenous viewpoints and knowledges (Bhuda and Koitsiwe, 2022).

Gumbo (2012) stated that Higher education institutions must develop really respectful and reciprocal connections with Indigenous people and communities in order for indigenization to take place. They also need to include Indigenous perspectives and knowledges into governance frameworks. The article makes the case that incorporating indigenous knowledge into the curriculum as a means of indigenizing and decolonising it opens up possibilities for contextualizing and decolonising the western curriculum. Scholars that advocate for indigenous knowledge to be taught in schools often employ the paradigm of embodied, contextual, and distributed cognition to discuss decolonisation (Rugedhla et al. 2023).

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

According to scholars of postcolonial discourse like Mapara (2009), Nyathi and Chikomo (2012), and Rukundwa and Aarde (2007) postcoloniality is both a theory and a tool to examine the long-standing impact of cultures that were in contact with each other particularly during the colonial period and has emphasis on Western colonial interactions with non-western countries. Thus, one of the main aims of the postcolonial theory is to uncover local knowledge that may have been side-lined due to the privileging of western traditions. In fact, Quayson (2002, 2) conceptualises postcolonial theory as a theory as one that “involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies as well as at the level of more general global developments thought to be the after effects of empire.” In other words, postcolonial theory is a means of defiance by which any exploitative and discriminative practices, regardless of time and place, can be challenged (Rukundwa and van Aarde 2007). It is a theory that offers a critical perspective to the study of social phenomena, particularly issues surrounding power relations and dynamics between or among various groups in society (Velautham 2015). For Quayson (2002), the effects of colonial power did not end with independence. Instead, as Velautham (2015) argues, current social practices which have been established as a result of the colonial encounter such as inherited governments, law, media, journalism, business and a range of other interactions are fraught with issues that stem from unequal power relations.

According to Mapara (2009), postcolonial theory is an area of cultural and critical theory that has been used in literary texts. The author sheds more light that it is a theory that focuses

largely on how the literature by the colonisers distorts the socio-economic and governance experiences and realities of the colonised. He goes further to state that the colonisers' literature tend to inscribe that the colonised were inferior while promoting the superiority of the coloniser. From the scholarship on postcolonial discourse, it is clear that what the theory emphasises at this point is that the colonised people's experiences and realities have been distorted or "diluted" (Logan 2008) for the coloniser to justify the colonisation of the colonised. For example, when missionaries came to Africa, they described Africans as "barbaric", "primitive" and "uncivilised" (Macagno 2009, Mukaria 2021 Stanley 2009). This had a lasting effect on the local people's culture, language, value and belief system, dignity, and this resulted in dilution of their identity. As documented by various historians and scholars (Logan 2008, Makamure and Chimininge 2015), the local people's own knowledge systems were pushed to the margins as European colonisers' ways of knowing took precedence in all faculties of life and people's wellbeing. Addressing this at independence by African countries took diverse and different models such that re-centring IK has been without challenges. The 21st century has seen increasing advocacy efforts by governments, civil society organisations and individual academics in mainstreaming IK but with little commitment on policy formulation and implementation. It is against such a scenario that we intend to demonstrate that equipped with the right theories such as this one, postcolonial theory, a few academic institutions are doing commendable work towards IK mainstreaming but, undoubtedly, face myriads of challenges in the process. Among them is that IK mainstreaming is not supported by enabling policy environments. A close examination of applying postcolonial theory in the context of Zimbabwean higher education indicates that the main challenge is that the education system is still largely Eurocentric with mostly colonial curricula. This is despite existence of the Education 5.0 Policy, indicating that its implementation is less effective.

METHODOLOGY

Informed by a qualitative design that involved an interpretive, naturalistic approach to data collection, this article investigates academia's views, attitudes and experiences in researching IK in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. Qualitative data collection methods included interviews, document reviews and informal discussions at conferences. We incorporated views gathered at an international virtual conference on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) held at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Zimbabwe on the theme: "Building Africa through higher education for sustainable development" held from 11–13 August, 2021. The discussions ensued coupled with informal conversations held with like-

minded lecturers on the IK subject matter at other institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe as well as available literature on the Africanizing African universities, internalisation of universities in Africa, among others, were put together to raise the argument(s) the article is making. The total number of study participants was 20 lecturers which was determined through the saturation concept (Mpofu, 2021) whereby beyond this sample size, there were no more new insights. We are aware that findings from this small sample are not generalizable, but insights got are essential for ensuring researching IK which culminates into the teaching and learning of IK in institutions of higher learning. The lecturers were purposively selected and only those who had some studies on IK were eligible for the study. The aim was to collect their views, opinions and experiences on researching IK. All the 20 lecturers were interviewed and data saturation concept applied was crucial to eliminate the need to identify more participants. Data collected through available literature and the conference proceedings were used to triangulate with the interview data. Chiefly, thematic analysis method was used guided by the objectives of the study and this was buttressed by inclusion of selected verbatim statements from the interview participants. In keeping with confidentiality and anonymity in research, we used pseudonyms to identify the 20 lecturers who participated in the interviews through use of a combination of a letter “L” for lecturer and a unique number. The first lecturer interviewed was labelled L1, the second L2, the third as L3 and the pattern continued up to L20. We have used these pseudonyms in this article to identify interview participants on direct quotations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are thematically organised and the themes that emerged were: (i) lack of financial support; (ii) methodological challenges; (iii) attitudinal challenges; and (iv) lack of enabling researching policy environment. We discuss these themes in turn in the following sub-sections:

Lack of financial support

From the discussions at a virtual conference on ESD running under the theme: “Building Africa through higher education for sustainable development” hosted by NUST from 11–13 August 2021, where IK research was part of the proceedings, it emerged that some members of academia were significantly working hard to ensure that IK is mainstreamed into disciplines such as education, health, politics, economy and governance. However, the participants bemoaned lack of financial support from other stakeholders including governments in the production value chain of indigenous knowledge. From the interviews, it became clear that if

complementary efforts are promoted in researching IK, this will ensure that findings and recommendations from the studies are effectively and sustainably implemented to attain transformative development in the country. This was echoed by one interviewed lecturer who emphasised that:

“Despite the fact that researchers come up with essential findings, the findings remain on paper in the form of publications but do not find themselves informing policy formulation” (L9).

The view expressed above resonates with Togo and Gaidzanwa’s (2021) argument that universities encounter many barriers, chief among them, being lack of resources especially the financial one. From both the interviews and conference proceedings, it became clear that, currently, there is little financial and material support from other stakeholders for universities to research, document and advocacy for mainstreaming IK across various sectors in the country. Generally, most academics view research as an end in itself where it helps for professorship promotion, yet sustainable development must be informed by research outcomes. Without a focused and broad-based or multi-sectoral approach in IK research, it becomes less likely that transformative change in the communities can be attained. This is consistent with Louis (2007, 197) who reminded that research conducted and whose results do not directly address challenges people are facing, then there is no need for research. This means that it is not only about a researcher disseminating study findings back to the communities (Keane, Khupe and Seehawer 2017), but ensure that the findings are practical to improve quality of people’s lives in a sustainable way. This reveals that financial support is required throughout the entire value chain of the research process up to application of the findings for transformation of lives in the communities.

To illustrate the above argument, let us demonstrate this by what presenters at the said virtual conference presented. A group of researchers from different disciplines researched on IK of an ethnic group in Zimbabwe where they wanted to find out what IK the community was using in the fight against flu-related ailments, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings were quite encouraging where a number of tree leaves, barks, fruits and roots were identified as the remedies to flu-related ailments. Since the researchers were social scientists, they could not medically “validate” the claims made by the communities. From the social researchers’ perspective, they presented the claims they found and their ultimate desire was to publish the findings in a journal or as a book chapter or a book altogether. In this example, knowledge on medicinal properties was missing link to complete the value chain of that research for the health benefits to the communities. Ideally, the medical researchers, pharmacists or biotechnologists

go further to identify medicinal properties of the indigenous medicinal plants researched and validate the claims made by the local people. When the claims are scientifically validated, this aligns with Education 5.0 whose one of its thrusts to encourage researchers to produce goods and services that solve real life problems. Unless and until such synergies are forged, transformative research into IK will remain detached from the mainstream community and national development.

It should be pointed out that funding research in African countries, Zimbabwe in particular, is very limited (Muyambo 2018a,b; Mapara 2017), let alone where IK studies are involved. Academia uses personal meagre resources to initiate research and when it does, it finds no complementary efforts from either the governments or private sector to turn the communities' claims into sustainable products that solve societal problems such as food insecurity, land degradation, environmental destruction, public health strains and governance challenges, just to mention a few. This results in findings either getting published with no one to seriously read them for policy formulation and implementation for improving the quality of life in communities. In most cases, the publications with limited relevance to people's lives often gather dust in libraries with low or no readership. To then blame academia on lack of edge-cutting research in IK is unwarranted. In our view, academia are often lone rangers in research especially where other players are required in the research value chain so that the research outputs become responsive to the needs and problems of communities. In fact, we argue that one's promotion to professor, a significant proportion of the individual's publications should have been applied in the communities to solve problems. Apart from the limited financial support for IK studies, epistemological challenges in researching IK also emerged and this is discussed below.

Methodological challenges

One of the most discussed challenges in researching IK was the issue of methodology. The interview data indicated that researching IK is not an easy undertaking especially when conventional research approaches are exclusively used. One of the lecturers emphasised this aspect in the following quotation:

“Researching IK is not easy methodologically. Questions arise as to what design and tools to adopt to research IK. This is compounded by the fact that most of us have been Western trained where IK did not matter and were never mentioned in our training. We were taught that IK is not researchable as it constituted no knowledge. Now that we all agree that it is knowledge whose agency cannot be doubted, we are flatly faced by how to research it” (L4).

The sentiment above argues alongside Chilisa (2012) who maintains that researchers lack methodological and theoretical skills to research IK. This sounds as if research was and is still confined to Western way of knowledge production and this is not surprising given the colonial legacies including education approach which is evident in the former colonies today, including Zimbabwe. We need to iterate that Africans before colonisation by the European nations researched in a number of areas particularly food and medicine. For example, elders would observe the direction of the wind, behaviour of different tree species, animals and birds to determine the weather patterns to inform that about farming preparation and disaster preparedness (Sithole and Chundu 2020). Their observations on the nature for long periods of time led them to conclude that if the wind blows from a certain direction and animals and birds behave in a certain manner, it would bring a particular kind of rainfall. This is what is called trial and error methodology. We are submitting that issues of methodology are inundated by power dynamics and as long as the Western domination in research methodology persists, it would appear like IK research has no specific methodology. We argue that this is a fallacy that needs debunking if the democratisation of higher education in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular is to materialise. Research has shown that researching IK using whatever methodological and theoretical considerations at the IK researchers' disposal is possible (Sithole 2014; Muyambo 2018b; Hlatywayo 2017; 2020; Dei 2014, 2000; Emeagwali 2003). More research is in progress as indicated by data from the interviews where researchers resort to decolonising IK methodologies as suggested by Chilisa (2012) but negative attitudes is also a major issue that limits progress in researching IK.

Attitudinal Challenges

One major challenge that was common among the participants was the attitude of academia towards IK. One participant clearly stated that academia has a negative attitude towards IK's efficiency and effectiveness in the mainstream development agenda. He noted that the training that most lecturers attained was Eurocentric in nature and this partly explains the negative attitudes most academics have towards IK. Most academia was trained to accept that only Western knowledge was and is still "the knowledge" (emphasis is ours). This has left a few academics researching IK and no wonder why Mapara (2017) talks of academics in IK as lone rangers. It is surprising that even efforts to democratise education in Africa, researching and teaching IK as a process towards the democratisation of education remains a talk show with no meaningful policies put in place to ensure that IK becomes mandatory part of curricula. Where the policies exist, they are not effectively implemented and enforced. With only a few

exceptions like South Africa, most African institutions of higher learning are still embroidered in a curriculum that bears no identity to African realities and existentialities (Kaya and Seleti 2013; Mararike 2016).

In Zimbabwe, researchers who should be on the forefront of ensuring that any research on IK finds its way into academia, are alleged to be Eurocentric (Mapara 2009) arguing that “there is only one sole epistemic tradition from which to achieve “Truth and Universality” (Grosfoguel 2007, 212). The researchers can be forgiven in that they were taught that validated knowledge refers to Western knowledge and not African indigenous knowledge. This is stressed by Doxtater (2004, 620) who asserts that “indigenous scholarship argues against the homogenizing Euro-master narrative [Eurocentric dominance] that seeks to colonize indigenous knowledge”. Be that as it may, this has resulted in very little research on African IK. What has exacerbated the situation is that those researchers who choose to validate indigenous knowledge and carry out research on this subject matter do this as:

“... lone rangers and risk being ridiculed by those who believe that indigenous knowledge is the forte of those who have failed in the “real” sciences and should not be seen to be attempting to bring in a type of knowledge that is perceived as belonging to the dust bins of history” (Mapara 2017, 3).

The quotation above demonstrates how the West has absolutized Western knowledge as the only acceptable knowledge to the detriment of indigenous knowledge outside the Western countries or Global North (Mapara 2017). This Eurocentric mentality has resulted in what Mapara (2017) describes as the relegation of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) to the peripheries of the academic world. Western knowledge has labelled IK as the myths, folklores and superstitions of indigenous communities (Sepie 2017). This negates the notion that every community, be it in developing countries or developed ones, possesses its indigenous knowledge upon which people build their livelihoods. This means that what has become known as Western knowledge is actually the Western indigenous knowledge. If Zimbabwean academics understand IK as not “scientific” enough then research into IK will remain not worthy of academic attention.

Lack of enabling researching environments

All the lecturers who participated in the study revealed that their working environments were not sufficiently enabling for research owing to a number of factors. One interviewee said:

“The teaching load in most universities is unhealthy for research. We have many modules to teach and this leaves very little time for research. One teaches 4 times a week and has no time allocated to research. If one happens to be part of management, he/she suffers a double tragedy in that apart from the heavy weight of the teaching loads, management meetings limit time for research. Unfortunately, some of these meetings are on an ad hoc basis” (L19).

While research must be given priority, institutions of learning in Zimbabwe allocate generally 4 teaching modules (and in some cases more than 4) to a lecturer where he or she is supposed to teach for not less than 12 weeks in a semester. The study participants also revealed that teaching load excludes student research supervision where, again, the lecturer-student ratios are unmanageable. In addition to this, lecturers are expected to participate in university service, where they have to attend to numerous university meetings. Once again, involved in university meetings leaves them with very little time to be in the community co-researching and co-producing knowledge with community members. The little time they create out of their ingenuity finds them scrambling to write as many articles as are possible for promotion purposes. This is less useful when research is supposed to sustainably benefit the community (Louis 2007).

From the foregoing, we argue that lack of proactive action in mainstreaming IK should not be blamed on the academics alone but on the administrative structure of teaching in universities. Where research is taken seriously, we have witnessed commendable changes in higher education curricula. South African institutions of high learning have taken on board IK research findings and recommendations. We cite a few examples here. Scholars such as Odora Hoppers (2001, 2002) and Ntuli (2002). Kaya 2013, Khupe (2014), Ngulube (2017) have done tremendous research on IK and education where the clarion call is for the inclusion of IK into education. The momentum in IK research in South Africa has resulted in curricula changes where IK has been included into research through the Department of Science and Technology (DST) (Muyambo 2018b; Bhuda, Setshego and Koitsiwe 2025). To date, there are these progressive developments in South Africa towards mainstreaming IK: the IKS Bill, National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Office (NIKSO), IKS Ringed Fund, IKS Advisory Committee and IKS Centres. This demonstrates the commitment and depth at which the government of South Africa prioritises IK (Bhuda and Masenya 2025). Also, it creates an encouraging ambiance for researching into IK.

In the Zimbabwean context, IK scholars have done commendable research on IK but mostly as lone rangers. These include but not limited to Mapara (2009, 2017), Mawere (2012, 2014), Sithole (2014, 2020, 2021), Sithole, Hlatywayo and Muyambo (2021), Muyambo (2016,

2017, 2018a) and Muyambo and Marashe (2020), among many others. Despite the findings and recommendations made by these scholars, nothing tangible from their research has been taken aboard in terms of mainstreaming the inclusion of IK into our education, health, economy and governance. All the examples cited are meant to illustrate that academia is doing its bit but something, somewhere is not complementing. The government institutions such as the Research Council of Zimbabwe (RCZ) and the private sector are not taking their rightful place at the research desk and complement academia. Where they seem to be visible, there are bureaucracies that frustrate researchers and at times these agencies are ill-funded to meaningfully embark on sustainable research for societal transformation.

“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”: Lessons from Alvin Toffler (1970). Having identified some of the pitfalls that stifle mainstreaming IK research, this section draws lessons from what Toffler (1970) said decades ago. Some of the problems identified for lack of enthusiasm into IK research are attitudinal, bigoted perceptions of IK, and epistemic marginalisation. There is also the failure to complement each other when conducting research with and among the “foot soldiers” in IK research, the academics, who get their hands dirty in the field, co-researching and co-producing knowledge with communities and those who need to do more on the claims gathered during fieldwork, the lab scientists. Without trivialising the community as the lab for the local people’s IK, academia’s findings which are mostly in the form of claims should feed into “modern” lab scientist researchers who then “add value” (for lack of a better expression). At present, the value chain seems to be disjointed and dysfunctional. Hence no meaningful benefits seem to accrue out of researching IK (Lin, Stoltz, Aruch and Rapoport 2021)

The attitudinal and bigoted perceptions of researching IK have been as a result of the type of education that those who should research IK and implement the findings and recommendations went through. They were taught not only in a foreign language, but were taught content whose focus was not rooted in Africa. Adams, writing in 1975, was sceptical of the Africanization of education. He was rather specific when he looked at Makerere University where there was no need for the Africanisation but the “Ugandanisation” of Makerere University by ensuring that the staff there are not only Africans by skin but by positionality and orientation. The question of language resurfaces when we talk of researching IK. Whose language? In one of the most famous Mandela (n,d) quotes, he is alleged to have said, “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart”. This quote needs no over-emphasis for it is self-explanatory. Researching IK needs no foreign language and tools but should be done in culture-relevant or culture-sensitive approaches and processes.

The above observation points to the need to learn, unlearn and relearn as necessary processes if mainstreaming IK is to be achieved. To deal with the attitudinal, bigoted perceptions, this article argues that academia and all relevant stakeholders must unlearn what they learned where IK was treated as inferior, the othering of other people's ways of knowing. Higher education institutions in Africa must give up on Western approaches, which are typically thought to be the only relevant knowledge systems. To do this, academic institutions, students and academic staff must jointly reevaluate the innate hierarchy of knowledge systems. It is time for higher educational institutions to shed their colonial past, recognize the value of IK, and find ways to integrate their academic staff to put this knowledge to use. In our view, institutions of higher learning will benefit from the integration of IK at all educational levels since it will make learning more relevant and effective by allowing students to receive an education that is in line with their own innate experiences, worldviews, languages, and cultures.

Moreover, academia and all relevant stakeholders must further relearn that IK is a knowledge system that is not static but knowledge system that communities have been relying on for their livelihoods and survival. This indigenous knowledge, as research has proven, is efficacious in the education, health, food security, nutrition security, economy, politics, governance and general development of communities and societies. Failure to recognise this means illiteracy as cautioned by Toffler (1970). We cannot afford this illiteracy for it is costly in the realisation of "Africa Vision 2030", "SDGs" and "Africa Agenda 2063". Theorists of internationalisation of universities may be uncomfortable with this position but we think they should realise that internationalisation of universities as hubs of research, more importantly researching IK, should be context-based and that one cannot start from the outside but from the inside, as dictated by logic. This is what Education 5.0 policy intends to achieve through its heritage-based philosophy. While negative attitude towards IK is well documented from the historical to the contemporary times, we are reminded that "the illiterate of the 21st century are not those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn". We are, therefore, called upon to unlearn the Western epistemic hegemony and learn to appreciate African ways of knowing for us to achieve transformative and sustainable development within the context of communities.

CONCLUSION

The article highlights that research into IK in Zimbabwean higher education is mainly undertaken by a small group of dedicated academics but is hindered by a lack of broader stakeholder support. Major challenges include limited financial resources, the dominance of

Western methodologies, attitudinal barriers, and a lack of supportive policies. While some universities have initiated efforts to integrate IK, meaningful impact is constrained by minimal collaboration, insufficient funding, and inadequate training for academic staff. The article concludes that to realize IK's transformative potential for national development, there must be coordinated action, robust funding, and intentional policies that value and include Indigenous Knowledge at all levels of education and decision-making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study findings and conclusion above, the following recommendations are made:

- That academia should be encouraged to research IK by creating conducive research environments and availing ringed funding for IK research.
- That government and the private sector should complement the academia to produce edge-cutting research including adding value to the claims made by community members on a subject matter.
- That Research Council of Zimbabwe should scale-up IK research by ensuring that institutions of higher education in Zimbabwe have coordinated and well-funded research centres or institutes that report directly to RCZ.
- That researching IK becomes one of the main themes/concepts of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Minimum Bodies of Knowledge and Skills (MBKS) in higher education.
- Indigenous languages be mainstreamed into the education system and be valued in the market as medium of communication and instruction.

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