

Chapter 11

Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in the Higher Education Sector for the Advancement of African Scholarship

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ABSTRACT

This chapter argues that IKS could be used as a framework upon which African scholarship could be claimed and advanced without overlooking the importance and relevance of other knowledge systems. This framework can break superior-inferior, developed-underdeveloped binaries while keeping in mind the core mandate of education, especially in producing skills and a competent and knowledge-based society capable of dealing with both local and international challenges. The academic socialization on IKS would rather require an integrated approach to research which is also interdisciplinary in nature and aimed at interfacing other knowledge systems. This chapter is based on IKS case studies drawn from South African universities. Data obtained from interviews with experts and practitioners in the IKS sector will be engaged to enrich the debates in this chapter.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8461-2.ch011

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the academic and pragmatic discourses on indigenous knowledge systems have generated raging debates and contestations among scholars and practitioners alike. These debates often border the dichotomy between western and indigenous systems of knowledge production and application in real life situation. Academically, few scholars have focused on the integration and synergy between the two knowledge systems as opposed to their differences, weaknesses and independent existence (Agrawal, 2022; Grange, 2007). On one hand, Western knowledge has been categorized as more scientific, advanced and modernized, open and is regarded as authentic knowledge (Higgs & Smith, 2015). On the other hand, indigenous knowledge is seen as primitive and backward, underdeveloped, generalized (Barnhardt, 2007; Grange, 2007). The dichotomy between these knowledge systems or worldviews especially the Western dominance of knowledge production creates a false and fragmented base for integration to take place. Despite the criticisms leveled against the indigenous forms of knowledge, proponents of indigenous knowledge or indigenous people's knowledge such as Breidlid (2008), Grange (2007), Nataka (2002) argue that it is important for personal development. In South Africa, in the institutions of higher learning academics have been accused for recycling western models and theories with little or no relevance to the local situation. Western or Eurocentric models and discourses are dominant knowledge systems and they have an impact not only on institutional governance, but also in curriculum development in the higher education sector. Colonialism for example was instrumental in labelling indigenous knowledge as inferior and non-scientific hence not competitive to the rest of the Western knowledge systems. In this regard, Ngubane (2017: 13) state that colonialism is characterised by dichotomy of superiority and inferiority, dominant and dominated, oppressed or marginalised. Afrocentric knowledge is perceived as 'primitive' and backward hence the FMF students started to question the relevance of Western based knowledge.

This dominance left the indigenous forms of knowledge being disregarded and relegated to the periphery of knowledge production and dissemination. This hegemonic display of power on the part of Western/Eurocentric knowledge system has certain consequences for indigenous African knowledge systems. These consequences according to Higgs and Smith (2015) include 1) the erasure of the rich knowledge legacy of African people. Western knowledge systems are perceived as 1) authentic knowledge. 2) the forged hegemonic discourse perpetuated propaganda based on an unequal relationship between what was referred to as 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' countries. 3) The claim by Western/Eurocentric hegemonic discourse that progress is only achieved through the advancement of Western/Eurocentric science. The

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