

Chapter 14

Embedding Indigenous Knowledge in Library and Information Science Education in Anglophone Eastern and Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

There is need to re-examine the inclusion or exclusion of indigenous knowledge (IK) in the university curriculum in sub Saharan Africa (SSA). Western scientific knowledge on which the university curriculum in SSA is mainly based has proved to be inadequate in addressing developmental challenges. Using the curriculum of library and information science (LIS) departments in Anglophone east and southern Africa (AESA) as a case study, this chapter focuses on factors that influence the inclusion of IK in higher education in SSA. IK is recognised for its potential contribution to development by organisations such as the World Bank and African Union. Its inclusive ethos and accommodation of multiple realities also accounts for its popularity. In spite of that, IK has not established a stronghold in LIS curriculum in AESA. This study investigates the factors that influence its integration into the curriculum and makes recommendations based on the findings.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge (IK) should be valued, preserved, revitalised and protected. Higher education has a clear leadership responsibility with regard to the protection and preservation of IK. Higher education should take a lead in its preservation and protection because it is the hub of knowledge production and generator of the leaders of tomorrow (Moahi, 2012; Ngulube, Dube, & Mhlongo, 2015). Higher education must legitimise and validate IK as a pedagogic strategy (Dei, 2000) in order to transform

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the higher education landscape which has hitherto been dominated by hegemonic Western pedagogic ontologies and epistemologies. Higher education in SSA has failed to generate knowledge to solve the problems confronting society because it lacks appreciation of indigenous ways of knowing (Ndhlovu & Masuku, 2004).

Contrary to the assertion by Maile and Loubser (2003), higher education institutions in Africa have made limited progress in incorporating IK (Ndhlovu & Masuku, 2004; Ngulube, Dube, & Mhlongo, 2013; Ngulube, Dube, & Mhlongo, 2015; Schaffer, Ezirim, Gamurorwa, Ntsonyane, Phiri, & Sagnia, 2004; Tumuhairwe, 2013). The situation is not peculiar to countries in sub Saharan Africa (SSA) as countries such as Australia (Gunstone, 2008) and Peru (Sumida Huaman & Valdiviezo, 2014) once neglected to mainstream IK in their educational institutions.

There is “a growing discourse that demands the acknowledgement and inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems” in education (Higgs, 2010, p. 2414). Consequently, there is a need for universities to rethink indigenous presence and aspiration in designing and interpreting the curriculum (Ma Rhea, 2013). Sumida Huaman and Valdiviezo (2014) strongly recommended the inclusion of IK in education “as epistemological transformation towards social justice” (p. 66). The inclusion of IK in the curriculum of higher education may also expose students, who are bound to be instrumental in shaping a sustainable developmental agenda, to valuable intergenerational experiential knowledge which has been passed down from one generation to another within local communities in a given traditional geographical context. Kaya and Seleti (2013) are of the view that its inclusion in the curriculum may improve its relevance in society. It may also affirm the knowledge of the previously disadvantaged indigenous people and bring about transformation in the higher education system.

Apart from enabling IK to assume its rightful place in the fast-evolving information society and the knowledge economy, the legitimization of indigenous perspectives is a role that higher education in SSA should unquestionably play. The embracing of IK holds hope for the rebranding of universities in the continent to be uniquely African. It provides an opportunity to rehabilitate and reclaim the underutilised, neglected and devalued knowledge base and perspective of the indigenous communities (Yishak & Gumbo, 2012). Professionals in all disciplines including those in library and information science (LIS) have a role to play in revitalising IK in general, and in higher education in particular.

The nature of LIS curricula offered to higher education students is increasingly under the scrutiny for various reasons. There are questions being raised about the role that the curriculum is playing in the current crisis of LIS education in Africa and the provision of relevant LIS programmes as a potential means to address the problem (Kigongo-Bukenya & Kaddu, 2011). The critical challenges facing LIS education include the ever-changing information landscape that is driven by the knowledge economy, limited competencies among LIS professionals in various information and knowledge literacies, and failure of LIS to effectively contribute to the national development agenda as a consequence of neglecting marginalised ways of knowing. The inclusion of IK with its focus on diversity and development has the potential to demonstrate the contribution that LIS can make to development and the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals, which built on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations, 2015) and the vision of Agenda 2063 (African Union 2015). Its integration into the curriculum is likely to assist higher education to produce graduates that are knowledgeable and responsive to the environment in SSA and bring to an end an education system that deliberately reproduce inequalities.

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