


Chapter 2

Towards Documenting Indigenous Knowledge Systems Through South African Universities: A Decolonial Approach

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ABSTRACT

In South Africa, documenting Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is a means of safeguarding and preserving these knowledges. Since IKS are tacit, largely passed down over generations and deeply rooted in cultural norms, it can be difficult to accurately document them. Moreover, IKS is in danger of extinction if no actions are taken to ensure their documentation. Due to these challenges, a call for documentation of IKS in universities is necessary and need urgent response. Therefore, the study aims to investigate ways South African universities document IKS. This study used secondary data and drew pre-existing data from academic works such as books, articles and government documents. The results show that there is progress made by universities to document IKS through collaborating with government and other stakeholders. Despite these successes, there are still challenges with IKS documentation, thus the study recommends that other universities join this effort and seek out sustainable strategies to ensure IKS protection and accessibility.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge Systems (IKS) are the customs and wisdom that indigenous people have accumulated over many generations of habitation in a specific area. Indigenous Knowledge Systems are used to explain occurrences in the social, cultural, physical, biological, and spiritual domains. As per Marker (2019), IKS comprises every human contact that may be recorded, communicated, and utilized for developmental goals. These knowledge systems differ and are distinguished from the knowledge

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acquired in official educational settings. Indigenous knowledge Systems cover all facet of life, including environmental management.

For Indigenous communities who possess knowledge, it serves as the foundation for their survival (Azubuike & Aji, 2021). One way to preserve IKS for future generations, national development, and sustainable growth is through documentation. This is because the Indigenous Knowledge Systems are not static; they are dynamic and can be easily impacted and influenced hence the urgent need to document them. (Dei, 2000). Therefore, offering IKS in universities such as in research projects, collaboration with government and indigenous communities to capture this knowledge are some ways to document IKS (Bhuda & Gumbo, 2024). Makokotlela and Gumbo (2025) explained that because many South African universities have not consistently and widely employed IKS as a basis for teaching, learning, research and have community engagement initiatives.

it is crucial that universities in South Africa document these systems, considering the systemic bias and prejudice of a fundamental Eurocentric curriculum that is common, accessible, researchable, and normalized unlike IKS. Battiste (2018) clarified that academics should endeavor to develop IKS in universities which this will serve as a strategy for documentation. As pointed out by Battiste (2018), those persistent scholars will face a variety of discriminatory practices and systemic barriers as they pursue their goal of integrating IKS into universities. However, outcomes to document IKS can be attained via enhanced collaboration with the government, indigenous communities, stakeholders, and other universities that have initiated this process.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Unlike explicit knowledge, IKS is tacit, which is knowledge that is hard to express, codify, or impart to others. Frequently, it is founded on practical competence, intuition, and experience. As observed by Kaya and Seleti (2013), oral traditions, rituals, and experiential learning are common ways for indigenous communities to transmit their knowledge, customs, and beliefs. It is therefore intrinsically tacit because it is not always simple to document. There is a significant chance that IKS will erode without steps taken to document them, depriving the next coming generation of accessibility. Furthermore, the studies that were undertaken by Makokotlela and Gumbo (2025) indicated the biggest challenge that exist in South Africa universities is the continuous marginalization of IKS while there are efforts to acknowledge Western Knowledge as best in education compared to IKS. Through teaching, research, technologies, and university documentation departments like libraries, South African universities have effectively recorded Western Knowledge Systems (WKS) over the years. Furthermore, a lot of institutional support has been provided to build a knowledge base for WKS, while IKS and its importance in South African education have been overlooked. This strategy used by South African universities demonstrates how IKS is still colonized and remains undermined in higher education (Mkhize & Ndimande-Hlongwa, 2014). Therefore, to decolonize higher education, these institutions must acknowledge the importance of IKS and endeavor to document them using a variety of techniques. Documenting IKS in universities is bringing the voices of indigenous Knowledge holders in the academy and enabling them to assert ownership of their knowledge systems. Acknowledging IKS also gives scholars and students the chance to carry out research that will support IKS's protection, promotion, and preservation (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025). Considering the mentioned above, this study examines how universities can and have

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