Indigenous Knowledge Systems: A Panacea in Education for Development?
The Place and Role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Curriculum Innovations in Zimbabwe

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Abstract
At independence, Zimbabwe introduced an education intervention to ensure that all school going age children had access to education through its education for all policy. This move was adopted taking cognisance of the indispensable role of education in the development of any country. However, the educational set-up in Zimbabwe has been designed in such a way that indigenous knowledge systems are made to occupy a peripheral position. It is this periferising of the indigenous knowledge systems at a time when Africa, in general and Zimbabwe in particular, are working towards tailor-making education to become a catalyst for development that is the crux of this research endeavour. The major questions at the centre of this research are: Can consideration of indigenous knowledge systems in curriculum innovations be a catalyst in the production of active and innovative members of the society? Is expanding access to education to all a panacea to linking education to development and attainment of the millennium development goals in Zimbabwe? Can educational innovation devoid of the richness of the indigenous knowledge truly result in quality and equitable distribution of opportunities to education for the young generation in Africa? These and many other unmentioned questions will be central to the research attempt. For purposes of survey, interviews being carried out among the
educational practitioners, policy makers and economic actors within the nation. Questionnaires were also distributed to compliment the results of the interviews. The collected data was analysed, interpreted qualitatively and general trends were identified.

1. Introduction
Zimbabwe, like all other African countries has a very rich body of indigenous knowledge systems which find their expression in their technologies, the local education systems, field of medicine, expertise in animal husbandry, crop production, climatic change control and management. This richness is embodied in the nation’s cultural diversities whose humus has nourished the lives of people in the African continent for many centuries. Despite their contributions, indigenous knowledge and skills and technologies are not adequately promoted and protected in most African countries. According to Adam (1991) Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) have attracted the attention of many people resulting in the formulation of policies and legislative frameworks as well as demanding the need safeguard the precious resource has also been a concern of policy-makers across the globe.

The research focus is the relationship between indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), and education in Zimbabwe. It attempts to interrogate the dilemma of exclusively introducing Western-based scientific knowledge in a cultural context based on indigenous epistemology. It finally calls for more research into the viability of indigenous knowledge systems as a potential tool in sustainable development.

2. Theoretical Framework
This paper adopts an Afro-centric approach to the issue of indigenous languages and curriculum development. According to Dei (1994) afro-centricity and pedagogy suggest that Afro-centricity becomes intuitively an alternative way of knowing the world, and thus an “…investigation and understanding of phenomena from a perspective grounded in African-centered values…that calls for”… the validation of African experiences and histories, as well as a critique of the continued exclusion and marginalization of African knowledge systems, educational texts, mainstream academic knowledge, and scholarship (Dei 1994: 3-5). This Afro-centric stance is taken against the background of A. Babs Fafunwa’s (1982:9) postulation that no study of the history of education in Africa is complete or meaningful without adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous educational system that were prevalent in Africa prior to the introduction of Islam and Christianity. The paper will attempt a critical appraisal of the utility of the African knowledge systems, the place and role of these local theoretical and philosophical facts within the context of educational policy formulation, curriculum planning, implementation and management as well as the possible resurrection of the African epistemology.

Shizha, Edward (2006) contends that discussion on the social construction of knowledge in colonial and post colonial school curricular is of critical importance in any discourses of African educational development. He acknowledges that indigenous knowledge and skills have been relegated to the doldrums of the formal education system and for the establishment of a transformative and inclusive educational system, the indigenous knowledge systems have to be harnessed into the formal education system. Such a move would give voice to the formally marginalized form of education within most African traditional set-ups. For Shizha (2006), knowledge as a historical, cultural, social, spiritual and ideological creation should be a product of collaborated effort from all possible stakeholders to foster development and self-confidents in individuals

3. Indigenous Knowledge Systems
According to the World Bank (1998), the concept of indigenous knowledge systems has a lot of definitions which results from the differences in background and ideological perspectives of the people involved in the defining, and such people include among others, educationists, social scientists, representatives of traditional religions, agriculturalists, environmentalists and medical practitioners. For Warren (1991), indigenous knowledge is a term that make reference to the local knowledge, that form of knowledge that is unique to a given cultural set-up or community. It has to be noted, therefore, that indigenous knowledge is different from the international knowledge that is generated in universities, research institutions and laboratories. Indigenous knowledge, thus, forms the basis against which decision-making processes in all spheres of life which include among others, education, agriculture, science and technology, food security and health care. Flavier et.al (1995:479) on the other hand views it as the societal knowledge reservoir, the facilitator of communication in all decision-making processes. They further contend that this knowledge reserve is dynamic, subject to influence from both internal socio-economic, political, religious, science and technological changes as well as contacts with external forces on the global sphere.

Mwaura (2008), on the other hand, states that, indigenous knowledge is the sum of facts that are known or learned from experience or acquired through observation and study and handed down from generation to generation. Communities identify themselves easily with indigenous knowledge systems which have enabled
them to live in harmony with their environments for generations. The systems are important tools in environmental conservation, natural disaster management, socio-economic and political development. In summary he argues that indigenous knowledge is accumulated over generations of living in a particular environment. It is a broad concept that covers all forms of knowledge. It is traditional cultural knowledge that includes intellectual, technological, ecological, and medical knowledge.

It is, however, imperative to note that indigenous knowledge and skills are alive and widely used in Zimbabwe, in particular, and most African indigenous communities across the continent in general. However, what is very peculiar about indigenous knowledge systems is that they are unique to a particular culture and society and these systems are a basis for local decision-making in various life endeavors. What is critical about them is the fact these systems are entrenched in community practices, institutions, relationships and belief systems. They are clearly associated with “heritage and cultural tradition” (SA Indigenous Knowledge System Policy).

4. Why is Indigenous Knowledge Important in Educational Curriculum?

Dziva, Mpofu and Kuseri (2011:88) postulate that “comprehending the social context as well as the effects of the socio-economic and cultural background of learners is of paramount importance if a firm foundation is to be laid for the successful pupil achievement.”. The thrust behind their argument is that an Indigenous Knowledge Systems responsive educational curriculum is the foundation stone of any successful, pro-peace and development oriented society. Under circumstances where the local knowledge systems are given their rightful place they are expected to provide the framework for problem-solving strategies within the context of local communities which respond to and are informed by the life experiences, the concerns and challenges of the lives of the people within them. The systems would spell out the local people’s understanding of themselves, their environment and the society surrounding them.

5. Findings

There is need to adopt a new form of educational curriculum rooted in the positive components of the local African thought systems (philosophy). These indigenous curriculum dimensions could possibly assist in creating a buffer against the indiscriminate acceptance of all foreign oriented pedagogy which has resultanty fuelled negative images about Africa, leading to the adoption of foreign sensibilities by Zimbabwean graduates, who have tended to lookdown upon the traditional way of life (Tedla, 1995). The research actually revealed that there is need for an educational curriculum that is anchored in the Zimbabwean indigenous thought systems, prudently borrowing from the wisdom and technical expertise that has been tried and tested. It is this indigenous philosophy that has withstood the test of time that should form the cornerstone of educational curriculum in Zimbabwe. As Tedlar (1995) has argued, this cornerstone should be the pillar on which:

- The (Zimbabwean) cultural heritage can be preserved and passed on to posterity,
- The overcoming of ethnic and national obstacles towards acceptance and acknowledgement of the relevance and validity Zimbabwean traditional experiences in the socialisation of the present generation can be realised,
- The centring of the indigenous knowledge systems in discourses of curriculum policy formulation, curriculum design, planning, implementation, evaluation and re-designing can be attempted,
- The immersing of the new generation into the path towards an Afro-centred approach to Zimbabwean development and ultimately assist them obtain academic excellence rooted in spiritual development, communal unity and unity of purpose (Tedla 1995:209-211).

From the research findings the absence of the indigenous knowledge systems in the current Zimbabwean curriculum is largely a result of the manner in which the knowledge and skills are passed on from generation to generation, that is orally. There are no documented information on the Zimbabwean traditional knowledge systems, save for those aspects that were hijacked by foreigners and presented as imported knowledge. Because of this lack of documentation, the elderly generation is dying leaving the richness of the knowledge and skills unknown and untapped for the survival, academic and social development of posterity.

5.1 The Class-Room Methodology as Stipulated in the Curricula

Looking at most curriculum documents for the “O” and “A” Level subjects in Zimbabwe would reveal that the main strategies of delivering the educational package, because of the demands of the assessment schemes and tools, tends to be western oriented. Indigenous pedagogy would dictate that the young members of the society are taught life survival skills and knowledge on the basis of their ability and pace (without having to exert them to an unnecessary and strenuous competition with others). But, with the strategies that are employed in the educational sector, children from different cultural backgrounds and experiences are placed in a single category and forced to compete rather than complement one another. With the indigenous knowledge pedagogy, the process by which the young members acquire their knowledge as well as the final expertise are very important
such that emphasis is not merely on successfully pleasing the assessors immediately after the lessons, but on the productiveness of the young members in the society.

Policy makers have to tap from the learner-oriented pedagogical strategy that is evidently employed by the indigenous Zimbabwean pedagogy. This strategy centers its attention on the learner with the ultimate goal, not of dropping some of them through a bottle-neck policy in the course of the programme, but ensuring that each of them, who would have gone through the traditional training process, emerges an unquestionable expert in the area. The current curriculum, however, is known for its large numbers of graduates who cannot easily fit into the productive sector of the nation.

6. Conclusions

Indigenous knowledge systems are an underutilized resource in the designing and development curriculum policies and ultimately curriculum frameworks and documents. Learning from indigenous repositories of knowledge, by investigating first what local communities know and have, can improve understanding of local conditions and provide a conducive environment for educational activities or experiences that will go a long way into developing the individual young adults’ potentials and skills as well the nation within the economic, social, political, scientific and technological realms. Such development, that taps from the perennial sources of indigenous knowledge would surely greatly contribute towards sustainable education for life as well as historically, spiritually and culturally nourished by development. Most of all investing in harnessing indigenous knowledge into the Zimbabwean educational curriculum will also contribute towards the reduction of poverty by large margins in the nations.

7. Recommendations

There is need to:

- Reviewing the curricula to harness indigenous knowledge content into the Zimbabwean education system, and identification of international good practices of integration indigenous knowledge issues into formal education;
- Hold workshops for educational systems to consider proposals on how best to integrate indigenous knowledge into the curricula and teaching practices and;
- Development and promotion of an African body of methodology and guidelines for integrating indigenous knowledge systems into formal education and training.
- Funds have to be put in place for the integration of indigenous knowledge into the education system, with emphasis being on the feasibility of their fusion into the existing and mostly western oriented education system.

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