African Indigenous education in the postcolonial period: A critical reflection

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Abstract

This article examines African Indigenous education in the precolonial period in Southern Africa, focusing on its key elements, characteristics, and educational significance within the broader context of the decolonial education discourse. By delving into primary forms and practices of Indigenous African education, we aim to shed light on how these systems contribute to understanding the educational landscape and the challenges faced in the wake of colonialism. Additionally, we explore the transformative role played by Indigenous education in Southern Africa in addressing the hegemonic influence of Western education during the postcolonial era. Drawing on existing literature and critical analysis, we critically reflect on the nature of a decolonial turn in African Indigenous education. The examination aims at contributing to the ongoing discourse on decolonising education and providing insights into the potential benefits of embracing Indigenous knowledge systems in contemporary African societies by recognising the importance of valuing diverse knowledge systems in fostering inclusive and relevant educational practices.

Keywords: African Indigenous education, postcolonial, decolonial education, Indigenous knowledge, decolonial thought

Introduction

In the postcolonial period, Indigenous peoples in Southern Africa have grappled with a range of challenges and opportunities as they seek to navigate the legacies of colonialism. Mbembe (2021) argued that postcolonies exist worldwide, but to claim they are free from colonial influence would be disconnected from reality. Colonialism was not a civilising gift or a

necessary historical process. Mbembe (2021) argued that a genuinely progressive ethos for the modern era must encompass the African experience with all its unique characteristics. Kohn and Reddy (2023) contended that the term colonialism is expansive and challenging to precisely delineate. Nonetheless, they upheld that it signifies the endeavour of European political supremacy that commenced in the early 16th century. Moreover, colonialism can be characterised as the progression of European settlement, forceful dispossession, and dominance over various regions worldwide, encompassing Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Southern African countries that were commonly colonised by European powers included South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Lesotho. These countries share similarities in terms of geography, climate, and certain cultural aspects. Gumbo (2024) argued that there are shared commonalities in ideas, beliefs, knowledge, practices, and so forth, across African countries. Although cultures are diverse in these areas, there are many similarities between them (Kolawole & Cooper, 2022). These nations encountered colonial rule. Rather than portraying colonialism as a thing of the past, Mbembe (2021) acknowledged its enduring influence. He was adept at dismantling the European intellectual dominance, a task that earlier scholars struggled with.

It is important to acknowledge that African Indigenous education in Southern Africa was dominated and devaluated through the domination of Western knowledge. Indigenous education was intentionally suppressed as colonisers enforced their own system of knowledge on Indigenous knowledge systems (Grosfoguel, 2013; Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Indigenous communities developed diverse methods to educate their people, but colonial powers sought to assimilate them into foreign cultures, eradicating their knowledge systems. Mignolo (2003) explained how literacy, territoriality, and colonisation were intertwined processes that served to marginalise and subjugate Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems. Indigenous learners acquired knowledge through varied methods and forms. During early childhood, education was predominantly overseen by the biological mother, with the community taking on a more significant role as the child entered adolescence. Language acquisition primarily occurred through interactions with the mother and extended family. Essential skills like work, hunting, and cultural practices such as trance dancing, herding, and crafting were passed down to children from elder clan members through hands-on experience (Seroto, 2011).

Scholars and activists have argued for a paradigm shift that challenges Western dominance and acknowledges the unique educational needs of Indigenous people in Southern Africa (Dei, 2016; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013). In response to the suppression, marginalisation, and devaluing of Indigenous knowledges, a growing movement to reclaim and revitalise African Indigenous education has emerged in the postcolonial period.

Defining the concept, *post-colonial* or *postcolonial* in Africa is complex and problematic (Shohat, 1992). St. Pierre (1997) provided a detailed explanation of the distinction between post-colonial (with a hyphen) and postcolonial without a hyphen. According to St Pierre (1997), "post-colonial" refers to the temporal aspect, while "postcolonial" is an analytical

concept. The use of post-colonial in a temporal context, implying "after" the end of colonialism in Southern Africa, is problematic (Shohat, 1992). Besides this questionable temporal perspective, the lack of historical specificity in post-colonial leads to the merging of diverse chronologies. For instance, some African nations gained independence in the 18th century, while others achieved independence in the 19th or 20th centuries (Shohat, 1992). The fundamental question that arises is: "When does the post-colonial period truly begin?"

In this study, we refrain from pinpointing an exact starting point for the postcolonial period, particularly in Africa and Southern Africa. Shohat (1992) suggested that everyone can claim to be part of the postcolonial era. Our focus in this study is to utilise postcolonial theory to comprehend the characteristics of postcolonial societies, specifically examining African Indigenous populations and their education. Hitchcock (1997) categorised three types of postcolonial discourse, firstly, discursive postcolonialism, that is, one that assesses the condition of postcoloniality as a discursive construction (something that is constructed through discourse); secondly, the type of postcolonialism that is deeply rooted in the aftermath of the significant decolonisation movements that thrived in the 19th century. This perspective resonates with the historical context and diverse cultural expressions of postcolonial experiences. We concentrate on this particular understanding of postcolonialism, which acknowledges the impact of decolonisation movements and encompasses a wide range of theoretical works and cultural manifestations (Hitchcock, 1997).

To emphasise the significance of our study, we utilise "decolonial thinking" (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 7) to highlight Indigenous knowledge that challenges imperialist narratives (May & Aikman, 2003). According to Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012, p. 19) decolonial thinking and decolonial options are initiatives driven and shaped by "all those who have been humiliated, devalued, disregarded, disavowed, and who confront the trauma of the 'colonial wound.'"

In his work from the year 2000, Peruvian scholar, Quijano, argued that European enlightenment validated Western knowledge, creating a hierarchy of human existence that placed Europeans at the top while marginalising others, including Indigenous peoples. Europe, through its global power, established control over subjectivity, culture, and knowledge production, consolidating these aspects under its hegemony (Quijano, 2000). Indigenous communities in Southern Africa have a deep history of being compelled to engage with colonial education through segregated institutions that catered separately to White and African students, enforced through legislation such as the apartheid system in South Africa. When judged against Western criteria of worth in terms of existence, knowledge, and skills, Indigenous knowledge systems were often dismissed as inferior forms of education (Romero & Yellowhorse, 2021). The education provided to Indigenous populations, when available, was often assimilationist in nature, seeking to erase their identities, languages, and cultures. Therefore, the imperative of decolonising education necessitates a thorough reassessment and transformation of current paradigms.

This article aims to examine critically, the role and significance of African Indigenous knowledges in shaping and transforming education knowledge systems during the

postcolonial period in Southern Africa. Specifically, we seek to explore the processes of recognising, including, and reclaiming Indigenous African education and its significance in facilitating this transformative shift. The main research questions emanating from this aim are:

1. What are the key elements and characteristics that define African Indigenous education, and how do these definitions contribute to our understanding of its educational significance within the broader context of the African decolonial education movement?
2. What were the primary forms and practices of Indigenous African education and how do these forms contribute to education transmission?
3. In what way can Indigenous education in Africa play a transformative role in addressing the hegemonic influence of Western education in the postcolonial period?

Before we explore the various and key practices of African Indigenous knowledges, it is crucial to define what exactly we mean by African Indigenous education and knowledge.

What is (African) Indigenous education (knowledge)?

Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003) observed that education in Africa before the coming of Western civilisation was generally known as African traditional education or the Indigenous African education of various communities in Africa. In this context, Ojong (2008) and Mushi (2009) defined African Indigenous education as a process by which inherited knowledge, skills, cultural traditions, norms, values, and attitudes of the tribe were passed on from elders to children by means of oral instructions and practical activities. Thus, Indigenous education is a form of education that specifically focuses on, and encourages, teaching Indigenous knowledge, beliefs, practices, customs, models, methods, and content within both formal and non-formal educational systems (Ebot & Lavngwa, 2022; Horsthemke, 2017; Khalifa et al., 2018; Owuor, 2007; Purdie & Wilkinson, 2008; Waghid, 2016). Formal education among Indigenous communities primarily took place through initiation ceremonies, with various members of the society serving as educators (Hlatshwayo, 2000; Junod, 1962; Mönnig, 1967). Other pedagogies or ways of knowing Indigenous people used encompass diverse practices such as land-based literacies, nature-based education, and place-based learning.

African education is, therefore, in essence unique to a particular African culture and society, unique because African Indigenous knowledge systems form the basis for African Indigenous education. Indigenous African education can therefore, be characterised by the following:

- It is situated in a particular context, which embodies the life experience, interactions, and natural settings of the Indigenous people.
- It represents holistic knowledge because it addresses all dimensions of being human, that is, physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual.
- It is derived from multiple sources of Indigenous knowledges, such as old knowledge that has existed for generations in a specific community, and which is revealed in historical events, ancestral wisdoms, and genealogies of the clan.

- Empirical knowledge that has been learnt through careful daily observations.
- Revealed knowledge acquired through dreams, visions, and spiritual institutions.

In short, Indigenous African education is essentially community orientated in ensuring the recognition and enactment of traditional values and practices in African communities.

Primary forms of Indigenous education in Africa

Gumbo et al. (2022) highlighted that the persistence of postcolonial tendencies such as cultural marginalisation, language suppression, and biased historical narratives has contributed to a disconnect between Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems. This disconnect has constrained and distorted Indigenous communities' understanding of their own history. Akoleowo (2021) contended that the colonial dismantling of the wide spectrum of Indigenous knowledge undermined the very foundation of African identity, depriving them of essential aspects that are integral to their existence in every possible aspect. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986, p. 16) explained that the distortion of African Indigenous knowledges during colonialism and postcolonial periods led to the deliberate undervaluing of "a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser." Knowledge cannot be divorced from a people's history, cultural context, and worldview (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013).

Indigenous peoples in Africa have a diverse history that spans thousands of years. The term "Indigenous" encompasses knowledge that emerges from an extended period of inhabiting a specific location. Indigenous communities, with their cultural practices and deep connections to the land, inhabited the African continent long before the arrival of the colonisers. Indigenous peoples employed various modes or means to transmit knowledge within their communities. Oral tradition, apprenticeship systems, ritual and ceremonial practices, community involvement, Indigenous language systems, social hierarchies and roles, informal learning spaces, gender dynamics, and adaptations to local contexts have all played a crucial role in the educational practices of Indigenous people in Africa, serving to transmit cultural knowledge, history, and values to many generations. Dei (2000) asserted that the knowledge acquired by Indigenous communities acknowledges the diverse and collective sources, as well as the collaborative nature of knowledge.

The devaluation of Indigenous knowledges can be traced back to the period before the colonial era when European powers imposed their cultural, social, and scientific views on Indigenous people—dismissing their traditional knowledge systems as primitive or inferior (Mapunda, 2023; Wright, 2017). There is considerable archaeological evidence that suggests that people have lived in Africa as long as they have in Europe, and that there were different forms of knowledges that existed before the Europeans colonised Africa. Throughout history, these people have faced challenges such as marginalisation, land dispossession, and cultural assimilation.

Oral traditions

Oral tradition and storytelling have played a crucial role in the educational practices of Indigenous people in Africa, serving to preserve deeply rooted African history, where written records were limited or absent. In their work, Jackson et al. (2022) highlighted the Western emphasis on disciplinary boundaries and formalised approaches in contrast to oral traditions. They advocated for adopting a decolonial perspective on oral history, shedding light on how numerous narrative discourses have actively advanced the colonial agenda by disregarding or obscuring the knowledge, experiences, and traditions of Indigenous peoples, women, and communities of Colour. According to Jackson et al. (2022), adopting a decolonial approach to oral traditions necessitates that researchers establish enduring, mutually beneficial relationships with storytellers and community collaborators within the framework of daily engagements over a long period.

Advocates of modern history take pleasure in reflecting on its ancient roots, occasionally noting with delight that history was primarily conveyed orally before the development of writing (Sharpless, 2008). Oral traditions included historical events, genealogies, religious beliefs, moral teachings, and cultural practices (Ali, 2010; Zegeye & Vambe, 2006). While oral tradition possesses a historical lineage and serves as a valuable historical source, some historians contend that pinpointing the exact origins of a story is challenging due to its instability over time during transmission.

An Akan (Ghanaian) proverb posits an intriguing perspective, *Tet eke asom ene Kakyene,* which translates to "ancient things remain in the ear," simply meaning traditions survive only by telling them (Rattray, 1914, p. 189). This proverb serves as a reminder that the oral traditions were designed to preserve historical memory, bridge the gap between present and past generations, and facilitate the dissemination of communal knowledge within the community.

On the arrival of the colonisers, most dismissed oral tradition as primitive and unreliable, considering written documentation as superior. They believed that Indigenous people's oral history and knowledge lacked accuracy and sophistication. European literature, written records, and academic disciplines were regarded as the only valid source of knowledge. This perspective stemmed from a Eurocentric bias and belief in the superiority of Western civilisation. While oral history may not fit within the traditional definition of the scientific method, it is a valuable and legitimate source of knowledge that can contribute to the decolonisation efforts. During the postcolonial period, oral history assumes a crucial role in the decolonisation process by centring the voices of marginalised and silenced communities and presenting alternative viewpoints on African history. It is important to emphasise that oral history should coexist and be recognised alongside other knowledge systems. Oral history provides a platform for marginalised communities to share their experiences and perspectives, challenging dominant narratives that have historically marginalised and silenced them. By amplifying the voices of Indigenous people, oral history contributes to a more inclusive and diverse understanding of African histories. Through oral history, alternative

viewpoints emerge that may differ from the perspectives presented in colonial or Eurocentric accounts. These alternative viewpoints offer a more nuanced understanding of historical events, cultural practices, and societal dynamics, allowing for a more comprehensive interpretation of Africa's past. It is essential to recognise that oral history should not be seen as superior or inferior to other knowledge systems but rather as complementary. By acknowledging the validity and importance of oral history alongside other forms of knowledge, such as written records and scientific research, a more holistic understanding of Africa's history can be achieved.

Apprenticeship systems

Africa was not only the cradle of humanity but also the cradle of civilisation (Asante, 2019; Diop, 1993). Diop (1993) argued that Africa is the home of humanity and civilisation, but that Europe has taken over or twisted much of the African record. Africa is the home of many of the technological innovations that laid the foundation for modern societies (Asante, 2019). The intent of Europe was to erase the history of Africans and systems of knowledge and to convince them that they do not have anything to offer to the "modern" world.

It was customary practice for Indigenous people before, during, and after the colonial period to use visuals such as artefacts, paintings, and rock art to transmit their knowledges to other generations. Archaeological research conducted in the last decade confirms that Indigenous people living in Southern and North Africa, as well as the Near East, developed key cultural innovations through, among others, rock art at least 80,000 years ago (Henshilwood et al., 2009). There are several archaeological reports that confirm that the San were one of the predominant Indigenous people who were involved in rock art and paintings (Bonneaua et al., 2012; Lewis-Williams 2002; Lewis-Williams & Pearce, 2004). The San are the most ancient people in the world and their existence goes back almost 60,000 years (Lee, 1976). San rock art captivated writers as early as the mid-18th century. Ensign Beutler was the first author in South Africa, in 1752, to confirm the authorship of the San paintings that were found along the Kei River in the Eastern Cape (Theal, 1897). Several decades later, others mentioned rock art in various parts of Southern Africa including the Kunene region in Namibia, the Ngamiland region in Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, and South Africa (Mguni, 2015). Research in rock art shows that rock art in Southern Africa could be as old as 30,000 years (Lee, 1976). There is a consensus among most scholars that engraved patterns on stone in Southern Africa are as old as 60,000 to 100,000 years (Coulson et al., 2011; Henshilwood et al., 2009).

Rock art and paintings were other means African Indigenous people used to depict the spirituality, economic, political, and social practices of the time. Many researchers studying rock art in Southern Africa have primarily concentrated on discernible and specific themes like hunting, archery, weapons, dances, and domestic scenes. However, they have overlooked significant subjects such as the spiritual and cultural interconnectedness between Indigenous people and rock art.

Extending from the Cape to Zimbabwe, the diverse array of rock art paintings indicate shared characteristics, including various dancing postures, representations of dying postures, and depiction of animals such as the eland (Jolly, 2021). These intricate paintings provided valuable information about the techniques, symbolism, and aesthetic strategies that Indigenous people of Southern Africa used. The rock art found in Southern Africa exhibited a significant association with medicine men, commonly known as shamans, who were predominantly prevalent among the San groups. The term "shaman" refers to a specific kind of practitioner who addresses the psychological and spiritual requirements of a community and indicates that the community has bestowed upon that individual a special status (Waddock, 2014). These captivating rock paintings often portrayed the vivid imagery of trance dance performed by the San people. The San trance dance represented a deep cultural heritage that has been passed down through generations. Trance dance is a ritualistic practice typically involving repetitive rhythmic music, dancing, and sometimes the use of specific substances to induce an altered state of consciousness (Keeney et al., 2016). This form of dance is often associated with spiritual or shamanic traditions where participants aim to connect with the divine, ancestors, or spiritual realms. Trance dance or similar practices can be found in various countries and cultures around the world. For example, in Africa (Lewis-Williams, 1981; Lewis-Williams & Pearce, 2012), trance dances are performed in traditional rituals among different ethnic groups. In South America (Lewis-Williams, 1994, 2002), Indigenous communities practise trance dance as part of their spiritual ceremonies, such as in the Amazon region among various tribes. Additionally, trance dance or similar rituals can be observed in Indigenous cultures in Australia, Asia, and other parts of the world where spiritual practices involve altered states of consciousness and connection to the spiritual world (Kolawole & Cooper, 2022; Marshall, 1969).

The Indigenous people of Southern Africa devised their unique approaches to knowledge sharing, primarily employing visual methods to teach practical skills. Often, they utilised demonstrations to illustrate farming and pastoralist techniques, allowing participants to observe, listen, and actively engage in various activities. The ancient city of Mapungubwe (meaning "hill of the jackal"), for example, an Iron Age archaeological site in the Limpopo province on the border between South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Botswana, existed between the 11th and 13th century. It was Southern Africa's first state before European invasion. This kingdom, which comprised of African Indigenous people, fostered a deep appreciation for art, resulting in the creation of a remarkable array of sculptures and models that depicted diverse animals and deities. These artistic expressions were highly valued and showcased the kingdom's commitment to artistic excellence (Carruthers, 2006; Wintjes & Tiley-Nel, 2019; Wright, 2017).

Archaeological findings provide compelling evidence that the Khoi, another Indigenous group, were the earliest settlers of the Cape of Good Hope. In a study that set out to determine the distribution of Early Iron Age settlements in the Eastern Cape, Feely and Bell-Cross (2011) agreed that there was a strong possibility of the presence of Khoi herders in the Eastern Cape, perhaps with seasonal camps along rivers, during the Early Iron Age. The Iron Age can be characterised as a significant phase in human development marked by the

utilisation of iron tools. In Africa, this era is believed to have commenced around 1200 BC, as Indigenous communities began the practice of smelting iron ore and crafting tools through forging techniques (Giliomee & Mbenga, 2007; Wilson & Thompson, 1969). These Khoi people engaged in the rearing of cattle, and they also possessed advanced pottery-making skills (Derricourt, 1977).

Indigenous communities employed various methods to transmit knowledge about practical farming techniques, encompassing aspects such as food security, environmental sustainability, soil fertility management, locally adapted approaches, and cultural preservation. These knowledge-sharing practices played a crucial role in fostering resilience within Indigenous communities amidst socio-economic changes stemming from land dispossession by Europeans. According to Kolawole and Cooper (2022), Indigenous peoples worldwide exhibit a strong connection to the land and prioritise sustainable livelihoods through activities such as fruit gathering, crop cultivation, and hunting. This perspective arises from the study conducted by the last-mentioned authors, which involved local participants from Botswana, Nigeria, and New Zealand. Their study revealed a shared understanding of the underlying epistemology regarding what constitutes fertile soil for farming. Save the Children (2000) also recognised Indigenous knowledge as a valuable resource that should consider the daily strategies employed by communities.

Before Africa was colonised, Indigenous people employed diverse apprenticeship methods for various skills. However, with the arrival of European settlers, different approaches, such as the use of machinery, and technology were introduced in these areas. It is important to note that the introduction of these European methods does not imply the absence of pre-existing technologies and practices among Indigenous communities, as outlined above. In the postcolonial era, scholars and disciplines must recognise the value of integrating Indigenous apprenticeship systems with contemporary knowledge and research. By combining these approaches, a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable practices and effective resource management can be developed, honouring both Indigenous wisdom and the contributions of postcolonial scholarship.

Language acquisition

Indigenous languages played a vital role in the transmission of cultural knowledge, including oral traditions, stories, and spiritual practices. The erosion of Indigenous languages due to colonial influence endangered these rich cultural practices and disrupted intergenerational knowledge transfer. Despite the absence of formal historical records for Indigenous peoples before and during the colonial period, it is essential to recognise the significant role those Indigenous languages played in shaping Indigenous epistemology. Through storytelling, proverbs, and tales, older members of Indigenous communities intricately wove together a sense of social and individual identity, preserving cultural heritage and transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next.

Language socialisation served as a vital mechanism for preserving and perpetuating Indigenous epistemology, ensuring the continuity of traditional knowledge systems and

worldview. Language socialisation refers to the process of using language to interact, communicate, and integrate with others within a particular society, acquiring the ability to use the language appropriately in different social contexts. This form of socialisation occurs when an expert or experienced individual engages with a novice, guiding them in language usage. Indigenous communities, such as the San included themes in their narratives such as, "marriage and sex, the food quest, sharing, family relationships, the division of labor, birth and death, murder, and blood vengeance" (Biesele, 1976, p. 303). Indigenous communities used language socialisation as a means to help learners assimilate into appropriate language practices and participate in community cultural routines, activities, and expectations (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). The promotion of European languages was often tied to efforts to assimilate Indigenous populations into the colonial culture. Indigenous people were encouraged or forced to adopt the language and cultural practices of the colonisers, leading to the suppression and decline of their own languages.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo (1986) argued that language is much more than a simple arrangement of words. It possesses a profound and evocative influence that extends far beyond its literal and immediate meaning. Using imagery, riddles, syllable transpositions, and symbols, language provided Indigenous peoples with a unique perspective on the world and its inherent beauty. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo (1986), colonisation deliberately sought to dismantle and devalue the cultural practices, artistic expressions, traditional dances, religious beliefs, historical narratives, geographical knowledge, educational systems, oral traditions, and literary achievements of the colonised, while simultaneously elevating the language of the coloniser.

The preceding discussion highlighted different primary and key practices of Indigenous people. Oral history, which fostered a more diverse and inclusive understanding of African history, was discussed. We also acknowledged the significance of various apprenticeship practices among Indigenous communities, as well as the crucial language played in transmitting cultural knowledge. In the upcoming section, the article will reflect critically on the role that African Indigenous education can play in the postcolonial period.

The role of African Indigenous education in the postcolonial period

Education in the postcolonial period remains largely untransformed and detached from the lived experience of most Africans and continues to be embedded in Western knowledges. In the light of this, there is a critical need in the postcolonial period to address the challenges of transforming education on the African continent, which remains embedded in an historical context marked by colonialism. This existential and humane need today requires education in Africa to be decolonised by means of a *decolonial turn* in education (Higgs, 2023) that reclaims the recognition and inclusion of African Indigenous education in the postcolonial period in the enactment of transforming of education in Africa. This reclamation should, however, not exclude and negate Western forms of knowledge in education but should rather be directed at a "fusion of epistemologies" that seeks to integrate both African Indigenous

knowledge and Western forms of knowledge in education (Higgs, 2020). What this means is that a core strategy should be adopted in African Indigenous education that seeks the best of both Indigenous African and Western forms of knowledge when it comes to the enactment of education and pedagogical practice.

Such a decolonial turn in education challenges the supremacy and hegemony of colonialism in knowledge production. In this instance, this decolonial critical narrative in education involves contesting the hegemony of a Western epistemological control of knowledge production in education while at the same time interrogating whose interests are served by this knowledge and its practices (Akena, 2012; Kodirekkala, 2016). The implications of such an approach at the level of pedagogy, assessment, as well as the operational logics of an institution of learning and its institutional culture(s), are that the local contextual expertise that African Indigenous knowledge systems can offer, can complement the capabilities of Western knowledge systems to generate forms of creativity and knowledge production that benefit and empower everyone in the enactment of education.

Lebakeng (2021) claimed that education in Africa is historically a function of its colonial history and this has had implications for knowledge production and the nature of such knowledge in Africa. Since the decolonisation of the African continent, the nature and purpose of education has been a site of contestation because of the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems in African education. As a result, several African scholars have engaged in a critique of colonial epistemology in asserting the legitimacy of African epistemology (Cross & Ndofirepi, 2017; Dei, 2004, 2016; Jimoh, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Ndofirepi & Cross, 2014; Oyeshile, 2008).

Thus, in deconstructing the effects that coloniality has on education, the following questions should be raised when considering African Indigenous education in the postcolonial period:

- In what way(s) should African Indigenous education impact on the task of, and approach to, knowledge production, and how does this effect knowledge production and curriculum development?
- How is the content of African Indigenous education to be aligned with the needs and realities of African societies and communities?
- What and how much of the content of African Indigenous education should be included in the curriculum, and how shall this incorporation take place? In other words, how should this content be integrated with the existing content in the curriculum?
- What are the possible research initiatives in African Indigenous education that can be embarked upon to ensure the integrity of intent in transforming education by including African Indigenous knowledges and value systems?
- What constitutes knowledge in African Indigenous education and how is this knowledge created and disseminated?

- The validation of knowledge is political. So, how should African Indigenous education define and validate knowledge for education in the face of multiculturalism, globalisation, and the internationalisation of knowledge?

Education in Africa has seen the systematic attempt on the part of colonial education to dismiss the value of African culture, language, customs, and practices in education (Shizha, 2013). This problem prevails in the postcolonial period where coloniality still contributes to the marginalisation and exclusion of African Indigenous education. To address this problem, African Indigenous education should set about:

- determining the extent to which the content of African Indigenous education is informed by African Indigenous knowledges
- examining the source of the knowledge that informs what is imposed on or prescribed for Africa, and how education is implicated in Western hegemonic practices
- interrogating the ways of knowing African Indigenous education validates and promotes, and which ways of knowing it ignores, invalidates, and why.

These actions would allow African Indigenous education to be valorised and legitimised in education in Africa but, we also argue, without leading to the exclusion of Western forms of knowledge in education. What is needed, therefore, is for the creative integration of Western and African forms of knowledge in African Indigenous education. This means that attempts at decolonising Western forms of knowledge in education should be seen to locate African Indigenous knowledges within a holistic epistemology that includes Western forms of knowledge. In other words, attempts at reclaiming African Indigenous education should not in any way strive for an epistemology of exclusion. In short, such attempts at reclamation should acknowledge both African Indigenous knowledges and Western forms of knowledge as constituting necessary components of a holistic framework of knowledge for education in Africa.

The danger in not acknowledging such a mutual compromise is that just as a Western approach to knowledge can be perceived to be imperialistic and universal, so too, the ideological nature of an African-centred approach to knowledge, if given expression in an African Indigenous education, has the potential to become as universal and exploitative. This is especially pertinent in the image of an ethnic fundamental understanding of Afrocentricity, which champions the tragic victims of socio-political conditions for which there is no way out.

We would therefore, argue that the interaction between a Western approach to what counts as valid knowledge and an African approach to valid knowledge needs continual displacement to ensure that neither obtains a dominant position in any form of educational discourse in Africa (Abah et al., 2015; Mawere, 2015). The ideal represents a fusion of epistemologies of both African Indigenous knowledges and Western forms of knowledge in African Indigenous education (Higgs, 2020). What this means is that a core strategy should be adopted in African Indigenous education, which seeks the best of both Indigenous African and Western forms of knowledge because, as Hoppers (2002, p. 15) stated:

The local contextual expertise that Indigenous knowledge frames can offer, can complement some of the mechanical, technical, and scientific precision capabilities of Western knowledge systems to generate forms of creativity that benefits and empowers everyone.

What the impact of such an epistemological arrangement, or fusion of epistemologies on African Indigenous education would be, is outlined in what follows. In the first instance, it would ensure that not only African Indigenous knowledges are acknowledged in education, but that the educational project of transforming education in Africa would be redirected. This does not mean doing away with Western epistemological frames of reference, but rather advocates an attempt at the creative integration of a diversity of epistemological frames of reference in African Indigenous education. Secondly, such a fusion of epistemologies would encourage critical questions being directed at the knowledge content that is included in African Indigenous education curricula, and how this knowledge is integrated in various subject programmes. This would require what Hoppers (2002) claimed as a critical or reflexive praxis, and an ongoing willingness towards reflexivity. She went on to state that such a self-reflexive praxis directed at an education practice which advocates the rediscovery of an African gnosis (ways of knowing) would be concerned with, among other things:

- critiquing conceptual systems that depend on a Western epistemological order exclusively
- establishing parameters of rationality and ethically sound and ecologically constituted ways of thinking about education
- paying attention to the originality of African contributions and the foregrounding of African Indigenous knowledge systems
- monitoring and evaluating cultural and gender bias in curricula.

Thirdly, such a fusion of epistemologies would address issues of alienation and dominance. By means of critical inquiry, any oppressive situation would be unveiled, analysed, and changed. This idea has been raised by Freire (1970, p. 36) in his notion of "reflection and action" and by Newsum (1990, p. 85) in his reference to "reflection with positive and active participation." Any form of education would, in such an instance, as McLaren (1989) noted, be primarily involved with processes of inquiry that do not see the oppressive situation as a closed world from which there is no exit but rather, as a process of constructing and building possibilities through imagination and hope. Hence, any form of education that seeks to integrate African Indigenous knowledges and Western forms of knowledge would be mainly concerned with empowering learners to gain increasing confidence in their own abilities while, at the same time, acquiring a sense of pride in their own ways of being and acting in the world. This means that these forms of education would provide learners with an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of their own voices after they have grappled with the education content offered to them. In so doing, learners would be encouraged to seek out the significant connections between the knowledge contents offered in education curricula and their own life experiences.

Finally, a fusion of epistemologies in African Indigenous education that seeks to integrate both African Indigenous knowledges and Western forms of knowledge in education would see knowledge development as a holistic journey that includes process, content, and the socio-cultural context in which learning is being modelled (Higgs, 2016). According to Hoppers (2002), the view that sees knowledge simply as information and mediated by instruction should be challenged because it removes learners from knowledge as wisdom and consequently detracts attention from those who hold the responsibility for the transmission of such knowledge. Ramose (1998) reminded us, furthermore, that wisdom is an openness to unfolding practices, which also acclaims co-operation rather than conquest and competition. The golden rule of wisdom, Ramose (1998, p. 2) argued, is that "reductionism, absolutism, universalism, and dogmatism are an injury to the complexity of life as a holistic phenomenon."

According to these insights, a fusion of epistemologies in education that integrates African Indigenous knowledges with Western forms of knowledge should, therefore, perceive learning as cooperation and not primarily competition in its endeavour to construct knowledge that empowers Africa communities (Kenzo, 2002).

African Indigenous education views learning as a cooperative endeavour rather than a competitive one, and is rooted in its embrace of diversity and guided by a practical aim to enhance the quality of life for all. Indigenous education has the potential to ensure that education ceases to function as an ideological tool serving group interests in maintaining relations of power and domination. Education in Africa certainly stands in need of this liberation from ideological hegemony, which derives its power from the hegemony of Western forms of knowledge. People cannot be empowered if they are locked into ways of thinking that work to oppress them. Nor can people be empowered if they do not have access to those Indigenous forms of knowledge that provide them with their identity as persons. The ideal of a distinctively African Indigenous education is, therefore, for an epistemologically rich philosophy of education which is characterised by multiple sets of conceptual schemes, each giving African educators an entry into reality and maximising a many-sided understanding of whatever educational issues are at question. Such an African philosophy respects diversity and acknowledges lived human experience in embracing the contribution that Western forms of knowledge can make in the construction of empowering knowledge that would enable communities in Africa to participate in their educational development.

Conclusion

Our intention in this article has been to reflect critically on the nature of a decolonial turn in African Indigenous education during the postcolonial period. In so doing, we have reflected on the recognition, inclusion, and reclamation of African Indigenous education in postcolonial Africa, and the challenges confronting African Indigenous education in its role in bringing about the necessary transformation of education in Africa.

These considerations have serious implications for African Indigenous education. This is because African Indigenous education should model an appropriate epistemology that

encourages a learning environment where the learner undergoes change because of the insights gained from an inclusive fusion of horizons in education and subsequently, becomes a wiser and more humane person, capable of living in harmony with the world. This in turn, becomes the prerogative of African Indigenous education seeking to decolonise Western hegemonic discourses in education while at the same time acknowledging the value and contribution that Western forms of knowledge can make to African Indigenous education in the enactment of the transformation of education in Africa. In essence, this constitutes the transformative role that African Indigenous education can play in the postcolonial period in addressing the hegemonic influence of Western education.

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