The potential of the African knowledge systems in perpetuating a harmonised African higher education system

Since colonialism and apartheid set foot in Africa – and until today – all systems of knowledge production, distribution, and consumption reflect Western hegemony. Africa's universities have since their foundation embraced Western models of academic teaching and learning. However, these models destroyed and excluded the native and colonised people; hence, the call for change was made in the modern era. This involves redressing structures embedded during the colonial era, which have not been fully rectified during the post-colonial era in any productive way; years into the so-called democracy, African unity is still the exception rather than the rule. This paper briefly discusses the possible use(s) of indigenous knowledge practices in contributing to the transformation of our education systems; because indigenous African scholarship and practices can enhance our education systems, which further contributes to the course of African unity by inserting African integral perspectives, experiences, language, and custom within the curricula, instructional materials, and textbooks. This change in knowledge systems will give students confidence, especially marginalised ones, to become globalised citizens through education that intellectually empowers and liberates them. This will further harmonise African scholarship, giving students the necessary skills to compete regionally and nationally and make a global impact.

The call for the decolonisation of our education systems and the institutional transformation of African universities is entrenched in the struggle for equality, social justice, and African unity (Battiste, 2013). The circumstances of inequality and the lack of transformation have pushed another generation of African youth into struggle and activism for harmony and social equality (Albertus 2019). However, the lack of decolonisation, transformation, and feeling ignored, undermined, and marginalised, led South African students in 2016 to a national shutdown of higher education institutions. In practical terms, student protesters have pronounced decolonisation over several demands, including making higher education more inclusive; changing the curriculum to give centre stage to African knowledge, histories, and languages. Furthermore, eradicating colonial symbolism and addressing anti-black racism in the institutional culture of formerly white universities were at the top of the African unity agenda (Ramugondo, 2015). However, although student demographics have changed significantly at most historically disadvantaged universities, academic staff

demographics have not changed, and neither have curriculum makers (Albertus, 2019). This lack of transformation has necessitated the need to interrogate and redress the history, culture, and symbolism of higher education institutions in our motherland, since all of this has further delayed the African unity agenda.

Even with these encounters, many initiatives have been created to address these issues; for instance, transforming higher education systems in Africa should dismantle Western-centred teaching standards, systems, associations, and representation (Ramugondo, 2015). Moreover, indigenous African epistemic practices can play a crucial role in the quest for African unity in higher education institutions or their core curriculum, because it has been recognised that African indigenous knowledge is a requisite for decolonisation to take place through the advancement of African concepts with their origins in Africa, and the inclusion of African philosophy in African educational systems through their respective university curriculums. As Tabensky puts it, "the increase of concepts rooted in Africa has the prospect of working towards the decolonisation of the African intellectual landscape and so ultimately the African mind" (2008:136).

Additionally, initiatives in the current transformation programmes of African education systems should focus on indigenous African knowledge systems, non-racialisation practices, and the dispersing and dismantling of historical apartheid or colonialism categories (Albertus, 2019). Our response should include working towards a hybridisation of identity, in which values and concepts from indigenous African concepts are incorporated into our scholarship and teaching curriculum (Battiste 2013). According to Heleta (2018), learning an African language should be a priority for other tribes of academics in this drive for African unity. The African educational system should be one that advocates for better representation in the faculty and student body towards improving the cultivation of intellectual diversity, especially in providing a platform for African voices who have been side-lined in academia (Battiste, 2013). Their use must push for practices for students to have critical knowledge and understanding of Africa's history and the experiences of its people; this emanates from the African proverb that says, "you cannot know where you are going if you do not know where you are from" (Battiste, 2013:54). For example, most South African students graduate without fundamentally knowing what apartheid was or what it did to black people. Students need to be able to connect to the knowledge of their studies and future scholarships to unite. Implementation of policies that ensure

the acknowledgement and provision of space for indigenous African knowledge systems in the existing political, economic, cultural, and pedagogical spheres is needed (Ramugondo, 2015). These policies and practices must constantly elevate indigenous cultures and African-driven belief and knowledge systems (Kendall, 2008).

For African unity in the academic space to materialise, there must be a deliberate programme on advancing African-centred discourses, paradigms, publications, and academic practices; in the same way that there was a programme to deliberately write off any indigenous African knowledge systems. With further emphasis, programmes, principles, and ideas associated with blackness must be prioritised and taken into the mainstream in African universities. The use of the indigenous knowledge system in the university or its curriculum should be concentrated on African realities, and the lived experiences of most black Africans (Agbiboa and Okem, 2011). Also, these African epistemic practices should make higher education 'relevant' to the material, historical, and social realities of the societies in which universities operate (Albertus, 2019).

List of references

Albertus, R.W. 2019. Decolonisation of institutional structures in South African universities: A critical perspective. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5: p. 3.

Battiste, M. 2013. *Decolonising Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing.

Heleta, S. 2018. Decolonising knowledge in South Africa: dismantling the 'pedagogy of big lies'. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 40(2): pp. 47-65.

Kendall, D. 2008. *Sociology in Our Times* (8th Ed). California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Ramugondo, E.L. 2015. 'Occupational Consciousness'. In *Journal of Occupational Science*, 22 (4): pp. 488-501.