

# Conceptualizing Indigenous Knowledge: Insights from Selected Key Education Stakeholders in Zambia

\*Christine Mwanza, Innocent Mutale Mulenga and Austin Mumba Cheyeka

The University of Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

Based on the influence of western education and thought patterns, it is a mammoth task to find unanimous agreement on what constitutes Indigenous Knowledge systems (IKS). It can be argued that it is impossible to obtain an unadulterated African Indigenous Knowledge because of colonialism which has been so long in place. However, critical issues can be unveiled and agreed upon that include the philosophy and practices of African Indigenous peoples. This article aims to unearth what constitutes African Indigenous Knowledge/education from the perspectives of some selected key education stakeholder in Zambia. To realise this aim, qualitative interviews were employed as data collection methods to have an in-depth understanding of the participants on the subject matter under contention. Selected key education stakeholders who included teachers, religious leader, traditional leaders and curriculum specialists were purposefully sampled across the country. The collected data was thematically analysed. The main findings of the study revealed that Indigenous knowledge is rooted in the Zambian culture and is based on native people's living experiences. Emerging facets from the respondents therefore pointed to mutual agreement that indigenous knowledge encompasses local knowledge unique to Zambia's culture, skills, beliefs, and practices developed over generations in harmony with the local environment and community. This knowledge is of fluid nature translating continually changing, being produced or generated, as well as discovering, lost or recreated. The study recommends the need for a paradigm shift in curriculum development and implementation, one that recognises IK not only as an addition to the mainstream curriculum but as a legitimate and vital knowledge system.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Knowledge, curriculum, education, perspective

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the diversity and complexity of IK, it is often neglected in knowledge production environments being generally described with words such as 'primitive' 'backwards', savage, rural and unscientific (Ezeanya – Esibbu, 2019). From birth, Africans are emersed in a cultural setting that values the authority of elders and emphasizes practical knowledge. However, classroom lessons frequently have little relevance to life in African rural setting especially. Learners are schooled in a system that devalues and undermines the authority of elders in the name of 'modernity' (Semali & Stambach, 1997). This results in having the unique knowledge and interpretations of reality produced by indigenous communities through a complex process of cultural construction, end up being made invisible, marginalised, and regarded as inferior social experience against a hegemonic epistemological mode that produces and legitimises a true monoculture of knowledge (Santos, 2015). It is thus imperative to take recognition that the knowledge produced by indigenous peoples generally takes on different meanings, according to different academic disciplines. In general, as Sillitoe (1998) explained, it refers to local traditional, technical indigenous, peasant, traditional and folk environmental knowledge. It is knowledge transmitted orally, through observation and practice, in a dynamic process that meets the needs of a particular community or society. Reclaiming cultural identities rooted within the authentication of indigenous traditions has thus been perceived as a way forward to decolonising western dominated school curricula, hence making education more relevant and practical in addressing the needs of Zambians. In trying to emphasise the point, Semali & Stambach (1997) further noted that unless courses taught in classrooms genuinely commit to local context and unless school curricular allows for multiple perspectives including the local inputs, school knowledge will inevitably become marginal and unusable, subjugating the minds it intends to free. It is from this

background that the author sought to seek clarity on what IK means from the perspective of selected key education stakeholders.

## Research Question

The study sought to answer the following research question,

What are the general perceptions of key education stakeholders in terms of indigenous knowledge?

## Theoretical Framework: Decolonial Education Theories

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's concept of 'epistemic disobedience' provides a framework for understanding key education stakeholders perceptions of knowledge hierarchies that privilege Western science over Indigenous ecological knowledge or written texts over oral histories. This points specifically to what Smith refers to as 'indigenization of the academy'—asserting that Indigenous knowledge 'is not "less than" but it is "different from" Western knowledge' (2012: 188). The stakeholder insights collected here must themselves be understood not merely as opinions about education but as Indigenous theorizations challenging colonial knowledge structures. Their calls for curriculum reform are view through the lens of what Smith identifies as 'strategic contestation' against systems that historically positioned research as a tool for dispossessing Indigenous peoples of intellectual sovereignty."

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Indigenous knowledge was rich with a number of characteristics that some of which Mbiti (1989) helped to outline such as; it is not individualistic, it is both formal and informal, it is closely knitted to the social and cultural life, it embraces both the physical and metaphysical aspects and it is not static but conforms to the changes ( environment, emotional, physical and mental). Unpacking the characteristics further, it can be observed that IK focussed on moulding one's career, orienting oneself to community life holistically with all necessary responsibilities for the sustainability of self, others and the environment. To indigenous people therefore, life and education are inseparable. Years of accumulated tested experience becomes the traditions, values and norms of the community. These outcomes are then passed down through practical teachings and word of mouth (Daswa et al 2018). Additionally, Mapara (2009:140) defined IK as "knowledge possessed by indigenous people in an area in which they have lived and earned a living for many years." Puri (2007:358) concedes that "indigenous people acquire IK through the accumulation of experiences, informal experiments and an intimate understanding of the environment in a particular culture." Mapara (2009:140) added that "IK includes those forms of knowledge that the inhabitants of the formerly colonised countries used to make a living. It is the knowledge that indigenous people apply to solve their daily problems." IK can thus play a crucial role in helping local people to make valuable products However, it is significant to take note as Tharaka, (2015) accurately observed that, IK and IKS are hard to define and categorise because they are politically 'loaded' terms. Defining what and who is 'indigenous' can be a delicate exercise in minimising the diversity of people that would be offended or antagonised by either being referred to as indigenous or not being included in the indigenous category or grouping. Questions raised in the context of claims to indigenouness can include whether somebody was a prior occupant of the land or what length of time a community and its forebears occupied regions. As the mix of peoples of different backgrounds and ethnicities becomes greater, the situation becomes more complex, and the discourse must dissect whether only communities that are native, aboriginal, or tribal should be included or focused on. Quan – Baffour (2006: 464) defined IK as 'the transmission of relevant knowledge, skills and values usually to the younger members of society to enable them fit into their respective communities.' Extrapolating from this quote, it is critical to note that this form of education was immediately functional, and paramount was the fact that it was mainly targeted to younger members to be able to copy community norms based on their experiences.

Given the diversity of definitions for IKS, there is, nevertheless, a commonly accepted understanding and appreciation of IKS that is based on a shared understanding as well as an epistemic community focused on the same semantic space around the theme of traditional knowledge in various contexts. It is easier to articulate characteristics of IK and IKS and in so doing attempt to operationally define IKS in context. First and foremost,

IKS are always local based in and rooted to a particular place and set of experiences and generated by the people living in those places. IK is often transmitted orally, or through imitation and demonstration. IK results from practical engagement in everyday life and is constantly reinforced by trial and error. More importantly, IKS do not often have substantial grounding in explicit theoretical knowledge. Most importantly, IK is empirical knowledge based on practice and has results that are beneficial to the community.

Notably, IKS contains a very important 21<sup>st</sup> century skill set for global citizens because it makes an individual have holistic education if curricula and pedagogic intentions are translatable into learners' experiential competencies (Owour, 2007). While IKS in Zambia is meant to prepare the youths for adult life, efforts by the Zambian government to integrate IKS in curricular had been happening in an environment that had given the privilege to western epistemologies. Consequently, it has been very challenging to implement IKS in the curricula. This situation has continued to bring about hegemony of knowledge construction in the Zambia's schools, and therefore, efforts to indigenize the Zambian school curriculum have had minimal success. Msila (2016) rightly noted that there was a disconnect between what is implemented during teaching and learning, and what the curriculum reforms intend to be achieved in the classroom thus leading to parallel between learners' experiential knowledge and expected school formal knowledge. Yunkaporta (2019) asserted that indigenous culture and IKS in this case has designated thousands of years ago to deal with cultural problems and communities upon which education is born. To this effect, Menkveld and Bitzer (2004) believed that IKS is a philosophy, a knowledge system, and is critical for learning and teaching in schools, economic and legal civilization. Within Zambian communities exist those aspects of IKS which can be successfully integrated into the school curriculum during teaching and learning. However, the starting point should be a thorough understanding of how different key education stakeholders conceptualise IK as this may determine the commencement point and seriousness attached to the IK integration into the school curriculum hence the essence of this study

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative researchers are concerned with the meaning people attach to things in their lives. Central to the phenomenological perspective and hence qualitative research is understanding people from their own frames of reference and experiencing reality as they experience it (Cobin & Strauss, 2008). Lincoln (2005) also agreed that qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Interviews are believed to be one of the most important and rich sources of data in qualitative research. This is because qualitative research deals with human issues of a social nature and interviews allow participants themselves to report their thoughts and experiences thereby giving important insights (Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011). Yin (2003) and Roberts (2003) stated that interviews are usually preferred in qualitative research because they allow for flexibility and following interesting leads into the study focus. Researchers use semi-structured interviews to gain a detailed picture of a participant's beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic (Greeff, 2014). To this effect, the researcher found it appropriate to employ qualitative interviews due to the nature of the topic under study because of paramount was how the participants experienced their reality as far as their understanding of IK was concerned. Purposeful sampling was employed targeting selected key education stakeholders who included teachers, religious leaders, religious leaders and curriculum specialist. The collected data was interpreted and thematically analysed.

## FINDINGS

Unanimously indigenous knowledge according to key education stakeholders culminates or is rooted in the Zambian culture and is based on native people's living experiences. This knowledge is of a fluid nature translating continually changing, being produced or generated, as well as discovering, lost, or recreated. The respondents emphasized that indigenous knowledge is not static but evolves and changes as it develops, influences and is influenced by both internal and external circumstances and interaction with other knowledge systems.

“Indigenous knowledge refers to the unique knowledge, traditions, and practices that are developed and passed down within specific cultural groups or communities over generations. It encompasses the wisdom, beliefs,

skills, and insights of a particular group of people and is often deeply connected to their environment, history, and way of life. This knowledge is culturally specific and can include various aspects such as traditional healing methods, agricultural practices, storytelling, spiritual beliefs, and sustainable resource management techniques. It's essential to recognize and respect indigenous knowledge as it holds valuable insights and perspectives that contribute to the diversity of human understanding” (T07).

Notably, most participants perceived IK to be oral or written ‘special’ knowledge that is linked to cultural values of a group of people native to a particular place or society. Most respondents also understood IK as local knowledge unique to a given culture or society. Highlighting what IK comprises, participant RL03 coined his definition of IK as knowledge derived from the learners’ background, environment, experiences, games, language and passion. TL05 agreed but elaborated that

IK is acquired through interaction between learners and the environment and forms the basis of other learning stating that it can also be linked to stories, science, geography, cultural studies, medicine etc.

TL02 argued that IK is knowledge derived from the local occupants of a place saying this is knowledge that is generated by the indigenous people or natives of a particular place.

T03 and T05 in their examples pointed to IK being intricately associated with communal practices and beliefs (local culture), the passing on of information and practice from generation to generation. The teachers cited examples such as environment, agriculture, medicine, social structures, governance and spiritual practices as the containers of indigenous knowledge. Similarly, other respondents expressed their understanding of IK by stating that.

IK refers to the traditional, local knowledge unique to a culture or society, encompassing skills, beliefs and practices developed over generations in harmony with the local environment and community (RL01)

IK is knowledge an individual acquires from culture of a local area (L02)

IK is traditional wisdom and practices passed down through generations in indigenous communities reflecting their deep understanding of their culture, environment and way of life (CS02)

IK is worthy of survival skill for an individual in society (TL04)

Therefore, incorporating a holistic picture in defining indigenous knowledge helps to obtain detailed narratives on the philosophies, frameworks and fundamental aspects that can affect integration of indigenous knowledge into the school curriculum. Some respondents expressed their understanding of IK as a way of knowing that influences one’s understanding of the world and interpretation of its realities. Expressing her understanding of IK, CS01 said IK is a local way of knowing that are unique to a particular society that is native to that land. This knowledge facilitates their meaning making and is often closely linked to their cultural values. All the respondents agreed that IK is a structure of knowledge that guided problem solving and behaviour of people traditionally.

Participant TL07 said:

Even though indigenous knowledge was not written, it was passed from one generation to another systematically and eish... it constituted ways and wisdom in which society members learnt moral values and responsibility and explore on various life skills and leadership.

There was consensus in the group as noted from T06’s perception that IK is knowledge that is learnt in stages, and which enables each member of the society to be part and parcel of the community. Comparatively, other respondents during the study defined IK as follows:

Possibly there are cultural practices, experiences and IK that can only be expressed in local languages, this is because they were learnt in that language this is to say that for IK to be given a place in the curriculum, then



indigenous languages must be accorded the respect they deserve because in them is the background knowledge the child comes to school with (TL01)

Similarly, T10 described indigenous knowledge as

“Traditional knowledge, skills, and practices that are developed and passed down through generations within indigenous communities. This knowledge is often deeply connected to the environment, culture, and history of these communities and encompasses a wide range of areas, including agriculture, medicine, ecology, spirituality, and governance.

Most of the respondents appreciated that there are different cultures in the world but argued that learners should be acquainted with their own cultures. Respondent T04 said, learners should be taught to appreciate their cultures and African languages and should be proud of who they are. All the respondents agreed that recognising the importance of local languages is not enough, and that integration is necessary. Respondent TL06 expressed his disappointment with the current curriculum saying:

If local language and culture is recognised, then why can't it be part of the teaching and learning in schools? As much as it's underpinned but it is not clear in terms of pedagogy, how these things we are talking about here could be integrated in the curriculum and so forth”

Emerging facets from the respondents points to mutual agreement that indigenous knowledge encompasses local knowledge unique to Zambia's culture, skills, beliefs, and practices developed over generations in harmony with the local environment and community. This assertion is confirmed by what one respondent for instance stated when defined IK as;

This is knowledge of our local community in terms of its ways of life and mostly it's informally acquired through elders and interactions (CS02)

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In Zambia, as is the case elsewhere throughout Africa, prior to independence movements of the 1960's, Africans were socialised within complex and culturally diverse indigenous contexts. Even though much of the knowledge found in these contexts may have lain with a few persons in the community, IK does not derive its origin or meaning from the individual but from the collective epistemological understanding and rationalization of the community. Education in Africa has for so long been a means of survival. Every skill, knowledge or attitude learnt was either for protection, acquisition of food or shelter ensuring successful production. Besides survival, education equally saved the aims of ensuring unity in society. It is for this reason that Herbert (1993) noted that IK is not always visible, and even when it is, it is not always easy to understand because it is incorporated in the way of life. This confirms that even though missionaries and colonial masters tried to prove that Africans were not civilised when they first visited the continent, Africa has always used education of which they were fully in charge of. IK is not something elusive as many modernists would argue; rather, it is about what local people know and do, and what local communities have known and done for generations thus, practices that developed through trial and error and proved flexible enough to cope with (Warren et al 1996).

Analysis of the data generated via semi-structured interviews with the key education stakeholders who participated in the study had varied themes regarding their understanding of IK. For instance, Indigenous Knowledge as local knowledge unique to a culture; as a way of knowing; as being embedded in a local language; and as experiential knowledge to mention but a few. These views were like what Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003) noted when they said that the society largely determined the content of education in the indigenous society. The traditional African society expected the child to grow up and behave according to some accepted norms. The content or subject matter of traditional educational systems emanated from the physical, social and spiritual situations of pre-colonial African societies. The physical environment influenced the content of the curriculum in that what was taught was meant to assist the child to adjust and adapt to the environment to exploit and derive benefit from it. As Castle (1966: 40) argued, ‘Whether the child's habitat was dominated by mountain, plain, river or tropical forest, he had to learn to combat its dangers and to use its fertility’. To come to terms with the

physical environment, the growing child learned about landscape, the weather, and about both plant and animal life. As the child grew, he/she learned to understand the uses of both plants and animals in his locality, in addition to the taboos associated with them.

Most key education stakeholders expressed their understanding of IK as unique local knowledge that is linked to culture or a group of people that has been derived from the learners' interaction with the environment. Some as noted from the findings described IK as community wisdom that comprises values, norms and principles that guides the way of life of a particular group native to a specific geographic area, a position noted by (Odora-Hoppers, 2004; Karin & Jun, 2002). Similarly, most teachers expressed their understanding of IK as knowledge derived from native learners' background, environment, experiences, games, language and passion and is transmitted from one generation to the other. Shava (2016) refers to this oral and trans-generational transmission through narratives, stories, songs, folklore and poetry, visually through arts, cultural rituals and dances, and practically through doing and the artefacts associated with practice. The findings suggest that most respondents seemed to have a common view and understanding that IK is the unique knowledge that defines survival and way of life of a group of people related by a common culture and locality.

Battiste (2002) and as shared by some participants, that IK is generated by the indigenous people or natives of a particular place. Participants referred to IK as oral or written special 'knowledge linked to a culture and generated by indigenous people native to a particular geographic place. The respondents in this study believed that IK forms the basis of other learning in that indigenous knowledge is linked to stories, science, geography and cultural studies. These findings agree with Hoppers' (2004) understanding of IK as the totality of all knowledge, practices and skills which a group of people in a particular geographic area have, and which enables them to get the most out of their interaction with the environment. It appears evident that the participants' perceptions are that IK is place based and relate to the culture of a group of people. Specific societies have unique ways of making meaning of the world and have different ways of addressing context specific problems using indigenous forms of knowledge (Owour, 2007) and the participants' understanding of IK reflects Semali and Kincheloes' (1999) understanding of IK as dynamic way in which people living in a common locality have come to understand themselves in relationship to their natural environment, and how they organize that folk knowledge, including flora and fauna, cultural beliefs, and history to enhance their lives. IK was unofficial knowledge, essentially anecdotal memories of customary law, inheritance rights, beliefs about witchcraft, taboos, and rituals. This body of knowledge formed the wisdom of how things were done in the villages where most learners came from. Such IK, the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society contrasts with the international knowledge system, which is generated through the global network of universities, research laboratories and institutes. The distinction between indigenous/African and Western/European education was clear. Africans had to find a way to accommodate and make sense of both systems and, as a result the two systems competed for attention.

Notably, the key stakeholders who participated in the conceptualized IKS not through Western taxonomies of 'traditional' versus 'modern' but as dynamic, living epistemologies. This aligns with Smith's argument that Indigenous knowledge systems 'have their own internal dynamism and momentum, their own systems of logic' (2012:188). When a Zambian elder describes agricultural knowledge transmitted through proverbs and seasonal observations, this represents what Ngũgĩ calls 'orature' entailing that knowledge systems are as sophisticated as written traditions yet delegitimized through colonial education's privileging of literacy. The key stakeholders' insistence that IKS is 'not static' challenges primitivist stereotypes while asserting epistemological self-determination."

Education is 'the process of cultural transmission and renewal', the process whereby the adult members of a society carefully guide the development of infants and young children, initiating them into the culture of the society (Adeyemi and Adeyinka 2003). Similarly, other respondents expressed their understanding of IK as a way of knowing that influences ones understanding of the world and interpretation of its realities. These respondents argued that IK constitute ways and wisdom in which society members learn moral values and responsibility and explore on various life skills and leadership. These participants further shared their view that these local ways of knowing are related to society values and culture and facilitates peoples' meaning making. This finding is supported by Hewson (2015) who described the African way of knowing as a sophisticated (but different) way of seeing and interpreting the world and explaining the fluctuations of human lives that

encompasses language, naming and classification systems, practices for using resources, ritual, spirituality and world view.

The uniqueness of IK as noted by Semali (1999), in a particular culture, however, does not necessarily imply that there is internal consensus or that everybody who belongs to the culture shares the same knowledge base for decision-making. For example, in Tanzania one finds the situation where on the one hand, African students are immersed at birth within a cultural setting that values the authority of elders and emphasizes practical knowledge; on the other hand, they are schooled in a system in which teachers do little to make classroom lessons relevant to life in African villages and in which the authority of elders is devalued and undermined. This was supported by Nyerere as far back as 1968 when he explained that,

At present our pupils learn to despise even their own parents because they are old-fashioned and ignorant; there is nothing in our existing educational system which suggests to the pupil that he/she can learn important things about farming from his/her elders. The result is that he/she absorbs beliefs about witchcraft before he/she goes to school but does not learn the properties of local grasses; he/she absorbs the taboos from his family but does not learn the methods of making nutritious traditional foods. And from school he/she acquires knowledge unrelated to agricultural life. He/she gets the worst of both systems! (p. 278)

Indigenous Knowledge as embedded in local language is yet another thematic area that was prominent from the responses from key education stakeholders' understanding of IK. In as much as a few respondents recognised the value of local languages in transmission of IK, most traditional leaders who participated in the study strongly argued that IK is embedded in local languages. This position was best illustrated by the reaction to a statement that was posed by one of the participants who said that when we talk about indigenous African knowledge, we are talking about knowledge that is hidden in indigenous languages, literature and folklore. This statement was enthusiastically agreed by the majority. These participants argued that the fundamental step in integration of IK in school curriculum is the introduction of local languages as a language of instruction at early childhood education and as a subject in the Zambia school curriculum, with some participants suggesting that most local languages be integrated as compulsory subjects.

The tensions key education stakeholders identified between Ministry of Education directives and community knowledge revealed what Smith termed as the 'cultural archive'—how 'the institutions of knowledge, Western systems of classification and representation, and the media' (2012, p. 35) continue to regulate which knowledges count. When teachers for instance report that examination bodies reject assessment methods incorporating oral testimony or community-based projects, ongoing coloniality is witnessed thus, the persistence of colonial power structures despite political independence. This aligns with Ngũgĩ's observation that 'the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard' (1986, p. 9), as education systems perpetuate epistemological domination.

Adeyinka (2000;19) defined education as 'the process of transmitting the culture of a society from one generation to the other, the process by which the adult members of a society bring up the younger ones' Most of the respondents also argued to a consensus that learners should be taught to appreciate their cultures and African languages and to be proud of who they are, and this should start from their homes going all the way to schools. These participants' promotion for local language recognition concurs with Matos' (2000) laments on African education and research that attempts to systematically dismiss the intrinsic value of African culture, language, customs and practices from the curriculum. Most participants noted that, even though the national curriculum partially provides for the use of mother tongue language for instruction in Zambia from grades 1-3, the government does not provide relevant supporting documents to teachers nor make it clear how it should be implemented. This challenge pointed by participants is congruent to Shizhas' (2005) conclusion that language of instruction in African schools is still the major obstacles in learners' cognitive development and learning outcomes.

In addition, most participants outlined IK as lived experiences resulting from the interaction between the inhabitants of a place and the environment. This is in line with Snellson (1974:1) who presented education as 'a condition of human survival, the means whereby one generation transmits the wisdom, knowledge and experience which prepares the next generation for life's duties and pleasures'; and Lane (1976:1, quoted in Kelly,

1991: 7) who defined education. as ‘the transmission of wisdom, knowledge, experience and skills. For most of the participants, the environment from which IK is derived during interaction comprises of politics, culture and religion that was used to instil societal norms and values as shared by one respondent who said, “IK has been there, you cannot separate it from politics, culture and religion”. It was evident that most participants understood IK as knowledge gained through experience from human interaction with culture, politics and religion as well as environment that governed social and economic life of society members as purported by Potokri (2016) in the literature. The study respondents also highlighted that some of the indigenous experiential knowledge concepts are gradually learnt in the community and they cut across many academic disciplines and thus, they pointed out that it is impossible to ignore the impact of IK on the school curriculum content and that it is imperative to reconnect education process with community developmental skills and values through curriculum integration of IK in order to regenerate and sustain communities. These participants’ views are consistent with the concept of integration of IK in the school curriculum as outlined by McInerney and Down (2011) and Sobel (2014) who comprehend indigenous education as the process of using the local community and environment as a basis to teach concepts in various subjects across the curriculum such as language, arts, mathematics, social studies and science. On the other hand, Ngara (2017) asserted that the western knowledge paradigm rendered many IKS invalid, illegitimate and irrelevant and IKS generally and particularly indigenous medical knowledge systems, struggled to articulate their voices from the marginalisation imposed by colonialism, globalisation and modernity.

From the various perspectives of IK definitions, and in relation to its integration into the school curriculum, it can be deduced that education, when it is defined in the broadest sense, involves the engagement of teachers and students in the mutual construction of meaningful knowledge and practice. From this point of view, it is therefore imperative that planners direct their curriculum design efforts towards a new way of knowledge production, not to abstract stocks of knowledge to be memorized but to practical applications of what is learned. The guiding question ought to be: Does the curriculum planner contribute to further subjugation or work as a catalyst for redressing the power imbalance that already exists between knowledges? It is very important, therefore, that the curriculum is flexible enough to include space for IK as part of local history, indigenous languages, metaphors, and folklore to nurture and support African identity. Unless subjects taught in classrooms have a genuine commitment to the local contexts including indigenous literacy and unless school curriculum allows for multiple perspectives which permit local community inputs, the "school" knowledge produced will inevitably become marginal, unusable to most students and often fashioned to subjugate the minds that were intended to be freed by the new knowledge. As African educators search for a more inclusive approach to curriculum practice, they are challenged to develop a practice that is not fragmented by the modern techno-industrial culture. They must confront the emerging challenges: How much control do Africans have over the production of their own identities? To what extent do they consciously and knowingly participate in defining themselves? What contributions have Africans made to global knowledge that continue to be ignored? The expected outcome of considering these challenges ought to become a reconceptualized curriculum practice which is inclusive, democratic and acknowledges African heritage, experience, identity, and history. All this entails that the utilitarian nature of African traditional education has been realised to the extent that, today, the call in most African societies is for a return to the indigenous education system, though in a modified form. The argument is that an education that has the input of all members of the community, and which prepares everyone for a particular profession or occupational activity, should be the norm in many African societies today.

## CONCLUSION

The findings confirmed that IK is actively employed in Zambian indigenous communities, even though it is treated by some as inferior to western knowledge. IK is practical knowledge that is effectively used to solve problems in indigenous communities, as sufficiently attested to by the findings of this study. According to Lodhi and Mikulecky (2010), indigenous people use practical skills acquired through observation and experience to solve technological problems. The study established that IK is valuable in the lives of indigenous people as they depend on the availability of indigenous artifacts to meet their needs. Indigenous experts use both conceptual and procedural knowledge to make products designed to solve problems. It transpired from this study that IK is developed through observation and experimentation. This finding is consistent with the view of Lodhi and



Mikulecky (2010), who stated that IK is the accumulation of practical experiences and is learnt through experience or acquired by observation.

The study findings stressed the need for a paradigm shift in curriculum development and implementation, one that recognises IK not only as an addition to the mainstream curriculum but as a legitimate and vital knowledge system. Efforts to decolonise education in Zambia therefore must go beyond token inclusion and move towards systematic transformation involving curriculum policy, pedagogy, teacher education, language of instruction and community engagement. It was noted that privileging formal education and isolating informal education and IK in Zambia as well as Africa at large will not guarantee a successful conversation of Africans to western mores. It was thus deciphered from the study findings that if education is to be more potent in Zambia, it must be shaped in a way that integrates the local experiences. IK is therefore important for education because it emerges from local experiences.

This study's findings illuminate the persistent struggle for epistemological justice in Zambian education, a struggle theorized by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's critique of cultural imperialism and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's call for decolonizing research methodologies. Key education stakeholder voices revealed that IK integration is not a yearn to return to pre-colonial practices but a radical reimagining of educational systems toward epistemological pluralism.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Operationalizing IK integration in the school curriculum requires what Ngũgĩ terms 'decolonising the mind' thus, systematic efforts to dismantle internalized hierarchies that position Western epistemologies as superior. This involves not simply adding IK content to existing curricula but fundamentally restructuring knowledge validation systems. Smith's principle that 'by reclaiming history, Western history also gets reclaimed' (2012: 34) suggests that integrating Zambian Indigenous ecological knowledge doesn't diminish scientific education but enriches it, creating epistemological dialogue rather than replacement. Policy frameworks must therefore recognize Indigenous communities as knowledge producers, not merely 'stakeholders' consulted in extractive research processes.

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