

The Applicability of the Ovahimba People's Indigenous Methods of Learning to Educational Programmes in Namibia

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to explore the applicability of the Ovahimba people's traditional methods of learning their Indigenous Knowledge Systems to educational programmes in Namibia. An ethnographic study was carried out within the Ovahimba community to explore the various methods they use in disseminating their indigenous knowledge systems among themselves. The data was collected through individual interviews and focus group interviews discussions with the sampled members of the Ovahimba community in Kunene region, Namibia. The data was analysed thematically, interpreted and discussed drawing further insights from literature evidence.

Key findings revealed that Ovahimba people have eight main methods of learning indigenous knowledge, which relates to observations, practical learning, show-and-teach, demonstration, consultation, dancing, folktales, questioning or probing methods, and incidental learning. Educational institutions, curriculum developers and teachers in Kunene region where Ovahimba people resides, are implored to align their teaching to the traditional methods of learning for the Ovahimba community so that the community members can easily grasp the curriculum content as those are their traditional methods of learning that are familiar to them. The study recommended the integration of the methods into the educational programmes meant for the Ovahimba community. Such integration would help Ovahimba people to relate their learning to their indigenous methods of knowing, ultimately enhancing the literacy level among the Ovahimba community.

KEYWORDS: Ovahimba community, Indigenous Knowledge System, Educational Programmes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Internationally, literacy and adult education programmes have been used to document Indigenous Knowledge and practices for sustainability purposes (Hankins & Ross, 2008; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), (2009). This study, therefore, intends to emulate the experiences of other countries to benefit indigenous communities in Namibia. The study challenges previous tendencies of offering literacy programmes to indigenous communities that bypassed local knowledge (either expressed orally, visually, or written). Researchers before me have contemplated whether it is possible to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into literacy programmes (McGuire-Kishebakabaykwe, 2010; Robinson-Pant, 2004; UNESCO, 2009). Thus, involving Indigenous People in the study provided an opportunity to tap from what they know and deliberate on the best way to develop literacy content based on their rich knowledge and practices. The interpretations seemed to mean also that the use of indigenous literacies (oral, and visual) for learning new information is undermined in today's societies. In support, Morales (2002) underlines that if people's Indigenous Knowledge is documented, disseminated, and utilised, through equitable access and sharing, it could bring educational benefits to those communities and countries.

This paper discusses the applicability of the Ways of Knowing Indigenous Knowledge System of the Ovahimba community of the Kunene region, Namibia. The Ovahimba community people are semi-nomadic inhabitants of the Kunene region and represents about 1% of the Namibian population (Mameja, 2015). The literacy rate among the Ovahimba people of the Kunene region is generally low compared to other regions in Namibia. While the statistics indicate that the national average literacy rate is 89%, the literacy level among the population of the Kunene region is the lowest, at 65% (National Statistic Agency, 2011).

Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) refers to the complex set of knowledge, skills and technologies existing and developed around specific conditions of populations and communities indigenous to a particular geographic area. IKS constitutes the knowledge that people in a given community have developed over time and continue to develop and pass on from one generation to another (Ndangwa, 2007). This study documents various methods of passing on the Indigenous Knowledge Systems of the Ovahimba community and reveals how the methods can be incorporated into the facilitation of the educational programmes meant for the Ovahimba community in order to facilitate their learning and improve the literacy level of the community.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research methodology, carried out by way of an ethnographic study. Qualitative studies are more interactive in nature, underpinned by a drive to learn more about what is going on (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Creswell 2014). Hence, a qualitative approach was used to enable an in-depth understanding of the methods used by the Ovahimba community in passing on Indigenous Knowledge Systems on health management practices to each other. In order to learn more about the group being studied, the researcher should live among the studied group for a considerable period of time (Sharma, & Sarkar, Chiranjit, 2019; Creswell, 2014).

The ethnographic design enabled the researcher to live among the study communities with the purpose of understanding, documenting, and recording their Indigenous Knowledge Systems. The study undertook a prolonged engagement, by interviewing the Ovahimba people and living among the Ovahimba community for five months. A prolonged engagement assisted the researcher to study Ovahimba people's IKS and understand the indigenous knowledge passed on from generation to generation, from the Ovahimba community members' perspectives.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Ovahimba community in the Kunene region have a pool of Indigenous Knowledge System that is passed on from generation to generation using various methods. The following section discusses the Ovahimba community's Indigenous Knowledge System, methods of passing on the knowledge, such as Indigenous Health Knowledge, and the relevance of the methods to the educational programmes and curriculum facilitation in Namibia.

3.1 The Forms of Acquisition and Sharing of Indigenous Health Knowledge

The Ovahimba inherited wisdom from the Indigenous Knowledge System of their ancestors. They obtained knowledge through listening to storytelling and songs, and during the dancing ceremonies, as some dances were performed to pass on cultural knowledge. This implies that the passing on of Indigenous Knowledge would be transferred and take many different forms such as dances, songs, storytelling, and poetry (Mundy & Compton, 1991). A study of the cultural practice of the Khosa of the Eastern Cape by Izu and de Velliers (2021), also reported that traditional dances are hinges around which cultural practices rotate among the Xhosa people of the Eastern Cape. Ulluwishewa (1993) advises that recognition of how indigenous communities acquire and share their Indigenous Knowledge Systems, would lead to local empowerment, self-determination, and development. This would also increase their self-sufficiency, improve cross-cultural understanding, and encourage a cultural dimension of developing communities (Hall, 1976).

3.2 The Ovahimba people's Indigenous Ways of Knowing the Indigenous Health Knowledge

The Ovahimba community has nine (9) Ways of Knowing Indigenous Knowledge (IWOK) and its practices. These Ways of Knowing Indigenous Health Knowledge were inherited from their ancestors and shared orally. These methods are observations, practical learning, show-and-teach, demonstration, consultation, dancing, folktales, questioning or probing methods, and incidental learning. Of these nine (9) Ways of Knowing, three of the IWOK are comparable; they are practical learning, show-and-teach, and demonstration. The slight difference is that, in using practical learning, the child is sent to get the correct plant parts on her/his own, taught and directed by an elder who knows, then later allowed to practice. While using show-and-teach requires the teacher (who is a parent in the context of the study) to get the correct plant parts and teach the learner (who is a child or someone who is learning the new remedies in the context of this study) how to use them to prepare the remedy and concoction. In addition, the demonstration method requires the parent or the person who knows, to take children to the veld and show them what the medicinal plants look like before he/she harvests the plant parts.

3.3 Applicability of Ovahimba People's Methods of Learning to Curriculum Instructions

In terms of the methods' relevance to curriculum facilitation, the researcher has observed that these methods are similar to those used in formal education. For example, show-and-teach is similar to show-and-tell which is used in Early Childhood Development Programs, to enhance and develop self-confidence among learners/children (Shaughnessy, Michael & Kleyn & Kinsey, 2012). The show-and-tell method used in formal education is one of the methods that enhance social and emotional behaviours and is important for children and students (Ningrum, Reza & Maulidiyah, 2019). The practical learning method could be compared to experiential learning, which allows students, especially in school and universities, opportunities to learn through doing (Dewey, 1938). While observation is one of the central methods used in science subjects.

In assisting the indigenous communities to participate in education, the Namibian educational institutions should consider community's Indigenous Knowledge Systems and practices. The IKS-wide recognition needs a change in the mindsets, attitudes, and practices, of people who do not value it. It would also be beneficial to Indigenous communities, if educational institutions would leave the assumption that the "modern" must replace the "traditional" methods of learning (Kaya & Seleti, 2014). Instead, or replacing traditional way of doing things with modern practices, educational institutions should rather work on modalities to harmonise traditional ways of life with modern practices

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Recognising the Indigenous Knowledge System of different communities as methods of learning in formal education would benefit indigenous communities (Lindh & Haider, 2010; Magni, 2016). Lindh and Haider (2010) suggest that IWOK be used in documenting Indigenous people's knowledge for educational purposes. Indigenous communities regard Indigenous Knowledge Systems as processes of acquiring knowledge, skills, experiences, cultural traditions, norms, and values (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1999; Mushi, 2009; Pask, 2001; UNESCO, 2009, 2010). In addition, researchers (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) regard IWOK as a critical ingredient for developing an interdisciplinary pedagogy, involving the disciplines of education, health, and Indigenous Knowledge.

This paper advocates for IKS to be part of the educational programme in Namibia, drawing insights from similar case studies in other countries where their methods of instructions make use of the community's indigenous methods of learning. The position of this paper is that if Ovahimba's IWOK as a method of learning, would improve their literacy skills. The Ovahimba people would also be motivated to attend available education programme such as literacy programme and learn new skills and contemporary information, as the methods of learning entail the use of their own ways of knowing.

There is, however, some positive development made elsewhere in the world regarding the recognition of IWOK in the education of Indigenous people. For, example, the Aboriginal community (the indigenous people) of Canada's Indigenous Knowledge System, is used in education as a way of learning (Regional Aboriginal Education Team, 2019). The Aboriginal pedagogies include learning through narrative, planning and visualizing explicit processes, working non-verbally with self-reflective, hands-on methods, learning through images, symbols, and metaphors, and connecting learning to local values, needs, and knowledge (Regional Aboriginal Education Team, 2019). The use of Aboriginal pedagogies helps teachers to guide learning through culture, and to embrace Aboriginal perspectives in their teaching methods, rather than the teaching content (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), (2016).

In Colombia, the Ministry of Education provided technical, pedagogical, and financial support for the participatory design and implementation of education projects and models of learning for Indigenous Peoples (Flores, Irma & Mena, 2018). In Nicaragua, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) assisted in the introduction of alternative educational programmes and projects, with the vision of developing culturally relevant education that accommodates the indigenous methods of learning for indigenous people. In Australia, known as 8 Ways, this model facilitates a culturally safe space for knowledge sharing and encourages teachers to engage with Indigenous pedagogies within the classroom (St John & Edwards-Vandenhoeck, 2022). The model underlines relational learning to the two Aboriginal communities, the Ntaria in the Northern Territory and Warmun in Western Australia (St John & Edwards-Vandenhoeck, 2022).

Chinese education considers that both cultural and social context factors impact teaching and learning practices in a variety of ways (Yang, Zheng, & Li, 2006). The Chinese traditional learning practice stresses the unity of cultural influences (Yang, Zheng, & Li, 2006). For example, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) education is a mandatory part of medical education in China (Hua, Fan, Dong, & Sherer, 2017). A survey conducted in China shows that students in biomedicine universities receive two semesters of training in traditional Chinese Medicine, amounting to over 200 didactic hours (Hua, Fan, Dong, & Sherer, 2017). These countries' initiatives seem to encourage the education systems to play a role in recognising IWOK as a method of learning in the education of the Indigenous people.

The absence of Indigenous topics and practices in education makes it difficult for indigenous people to connect or even want to connect, to contemporary information (White, 2015). If education systems would emphasise creating the connection between home and school by using Indigenous learning methods, many people may benefit to learn from Indigenous teachings and learning as well (White, 2015). Since education is key to knowing and experiencing life itself, for it to benefit indigenous people, consideration should be given to the use of indigenous methods of learning (White, 2015).

Indigenous communities have their Indigenous models, different from formal education, therefore using both formal and indigenous ways of learning would be essential to benefit the indigenous members of the community (Castiano & Mkabela, 2012). Hence, the inclusion of Indigenous communities' Indigenous Knowledge Systems within the educational curriculum is vital to ensure recognition of the culture and beliefs (Sparkes & David, 2015). Castiano and Mkabela (2012) encourage educational institutions to value Indigenous Knowledge Systems, especially on how it is linked to the way of living of those who are attending those institutions. This postulates the need for IWOK to complement and be part of the educational programme. This is a call for the Namibian education system to be inclusive of the IWOK of the indigenous communities such as the Ovahimba community. Considering IWOK as a method of learning and teaching in the educational programme, would enhance the community to cultivate positive attitudes toward education and improve their literacy levels.

4. CONCLUSION

The Ovahimba community has nine (9) Ways of Knowing Indigenous Health Knowledge that need to be recognised and used as methods of learning in the Namibian educational programme. Recognition of the IWOK of the Ovahimba people in educational programmes would assist them in maintaining self-determination, readiness to learn, and relating what they are learning to their IWOK. As an outcome of such recognition, community members would prefer to attend such an educational programme that

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employs methods connected to their Ways of Knowing. This would lead to a decrease in illiteracy in the Ovahimba community. Working in partnership with indigenous people in establishing their IWOK, might help educational institutions to ensure equitable access to education and developmental opportunities, as well as contemporary information.

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