

## **African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Decolonial Project: Towards a Genuine Heritage-Based Education 5.0 Curriculum in Zimbabwe**

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### **Abstract**

*There seems to be a paucity of literature, particularly on the confluence of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKSs) and the decolonial project within Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education curriculum (herein equated to the Heritage-Based Education 5.0 curriculum). Hence, the current reflection explores the philosophical interface between AIKSs and the decolonial agenda towards a genuinely Heritage-Based Education 5.0 curriculum in Zimbabwe. This reflection is secondary research considered handy where field inquiry is seen to yield little value. Secondary research was preferred because this reflection is predominantly data selection, not data collection. Secondary research was also chosen ahead of field inquiry because documentary evidence is readily available, cost-effective, and the process of data selection is unobtrusive (non-interfering/non-disruptive) and non-reactive (unaffected by the research process). The current reflection is informed by Afrocentrism (sometimes called the Afrocentric Theory) - a principle consistent with the African renaissance, Africanisation agenda, heritage-based philosophy, and decolonisation of education. To foster a shared understanding with the readership, the paper reconceptualises AIKSs and the decolonial project upon which it unravels the two often conflated notions of decoloniality and decolonisation. It is at this juncture that the paper estimates the decolonial potential of AIKSs, concluding that AIKSs are, on the whole, replete with decolonial proclivities. Expediting the integration of AIKSs into Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Education 5.0 curriculum, therefore, serves to urgently decolonise higher learning towards indigenous-oriented innovation and industrialisation. The paper, therefore, recommends the formulation of a clear and comprehensive policy framework tailored to guide and expedite the integration of AIKSs into*

*Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Education 5.0 curriculum with a view to advancing the decolonial agenda consistent with indigenous-oriented innovation and industrialisation.*

**Keywords:** African Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Decolonial Agenda, Heritage-Based Education 5.0 Curriculum, Afrocentrism.

## **Introduction**

African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKSs) represent African epistemology, which can be equated to African knowledge production, African meaning-making, or simply the African ways of knowing. The decolonial project, as underpinned by the Decolonial Theory, speaks to unlearning Western ideologies. Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education curricula have since been reconfigured into a decolonial praxis called the Heritage-Based Education 5.0 (HBE 5.0), as operationalised since 2019. To Garwe (2025), therefore:

The HBE 5.0 is more than just a curriculum overhaul; it is a cultural revolution. It rewinds the colonial tape, re-centering Zimbabwean heritage and ancestral wisdom as legitimate epistemological resources. This transformative model transcends the limitations of Education 3.0, a framework criticised for its Eurocentric bias and neglect of local knowledge systems. Instead, HBE 5.0 embraces 'pluri-versality', celebrating the symphony of diverse knowledges and fostering collaboration between universities and communities (p. 2).

This drift towards a heritage-based higher and tertiary education curriculum (HBE 5.0), thus, harmonises with the Afrocentric Theory (Afrocentrism), 'Narratives of Return' Theory, and *Sankofa* Principle – cognate ideals that urge African societies to return to something African, something rooted in precolonial times (*id est*, the AIKSs) for solutions to problems associated with the postcolonial dispensation. The current paper, therefore, seeks to explore the philosophical interface between AIKSs and the decolonial project against a backdrop of the vestiges of colonialism that continue to bedevil and haunt Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum.

## **Background**

This reflection comes against a backdrop of the vestiges of colonialism that continue to bedevil and haunt Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education curriculum (the HBE 5.0 curriculum). These vestiges or residues of colonialism are configured into a matrix, which Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) refers to as the 'colonial logic' expressed in the form of a triad comprising the coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being.

Coloniality of power subsumes the racial hierarchisation of humanity with Africans regarded as lesser beings placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, it also includes the bifurcation of the world into the ‘zone of being’ (the Global North – the core zone) and ‘zone of non-being’ (the Global South – the peripheral zone) with the culture of the former exerting heavy influence on that of the latter. Coloniality of knowledge constitutes the denigration of AIKSs, exaltation and legitimation of Western Knowledge Systems (WKSs), colonisation of African knowledge spaces by WKSs, and portrayal of the Euro-North Americans (Global North) as the custodians of real knowledge, which is worth being sought (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Coloniality of being gestures into “how African humanity was questioned as well as into the processes that contributed towards the ‘objectification’/ ‘thingification’/ ‘commodification’ of Africans” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 490). Coloniality of being, therefore, speaks to the Euro-American inclination of viewing Africans as sub-humans. This unfortunate idea of questioning African humanity and commodifying Africans finds expression in the ideas of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 A.D.) who, according to Kaputa (2011), once said ‘Africans need to be driven by thrashing’ and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831 A.D.) who, according to Funteh (2015), once remarked ‘there is nothing harmonious with humanity in Africa’. The preceding finds confirmation in Albert Schweitzer’s paternalistic but contradictory statement: ‘The African is my brother, but he is my younger brother by several centuries’ (as cited in Smiley, 2023), which views Africans as ‘sub-humans’, childlike ‘children of nature’.

The colonial logic seems to continue manifesting in Zimbabwe’s higher and tertiary education curriculum (the HBE 5.0 curriculum), whose architects consciously or subconsciously continue to emphasize Western epistemologies (WKSs) thereby marginalising AIKSs. For instance, most lectures continue to be delivered in English, which follows that knowledge-production continues to be done in English – the erstwhile coloniser’s language. The position that knowledge-production continues in English, therefore, sounds admissible because the language-in-education (the official medium of instruction) is what determines and shapes knowledge-production in any institution of learning. Western research methodologies (research paradigms, approaches, designs, and instruments), which are not readily accommodative of the Afro-Zimbabwean culture and heritage as grounded in AIKSs, continue to pervade knowledge generation in Zimbabwe’s higher and tertiary education curriculum. Despite the HBE 5.0 philosophy, which is currently the catchphrase, the Occidental pedagogies (e.g. methodologies of equilibrium), Western capitalist values

in general, and neoliberal economic values of competitive individualism, consumerism, efficiency and productivity, in particular, continue to suffuse Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education curriculum.

Regrettably, the Government of Zimbabwe (2018) (a principal document guiding the implementation of HBE 5.0) says nothing about integrating the communocentric AIKSs into the modernisation and industrialisation of Zimbabwe through education, science, and technology. Even the University of Zimbabwe Vice-Chancellor's (2022) *Teacher Education Transformation Programme*, another principal document on HBE 5.0, is also silent on the communocentric AIKSs. Consequently, the Occidental pedagogies and Western capitalist values continue to propagate what could be termed the cut-throat competition within Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education, which is at tangent with the communocentric and cooperative African worldview grounded in AIKSs and *Unhu/Ubuntu*. This continued reliance on WKSs is evident despite the purportedly indigenous-oriented HBE 5.0 blueprint operationalised since 2019 ostensibly to decolonise and transform Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education curricula and training programmes. AIKSs and the languages that carry them on the whole continue to be peripherised, which constitutes the continuity of coloniality.

The continuity of coloniality of knowledge is confirmed by Tarugarira (2024), who reiterates that contemporary institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe are still operating largely within Western paradigms of knowledge production. While HBE 5.0 aims to dismantle colonial legacies and embed the indigenous cultural heritage, AIKSs remain marginalised (Tarugarira, 2024). It is concluded in Tarugarira's (2024) study that indigenous values and religious cultures are insufficiently harnessed, limiting the alignment of national education, innovation, science, and technology development with the broader heritage-based developmental goals. This paper, therefore, interrelates AIKSs and decoloniality towards a genuinely Heritage-Based Education 5.0 (HBE 5.0) curriculum in Zimbabwe. Such an undertaking is also targeted at re-awakening the local philosophers of education so that they save themselves from becoming intellectual imposters basically good at mimicking dominant theories and knowledges within the Western academy.

### **Problem postulation**

The current reflection is motivated by the continuity of coloniality – the colonial logic which continues to manifest in postcolonial Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education curriculum as

emblematised by the emphasis that it continues to place on the WKSs. Consequently, African Indigenous Knowledge is still an under-utilised resource in local development activities (Zengeya-Makuku *et al.*, 2013). Hence, Afro-Zimbabweans could be losing what could be of value to them. In spite of the HBE 5.0 philosophy, which is currently the catch-phrase, Western epistemologies continue to suffuse Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education curriculum. It is, therefore, incumbent upon this reflection to estimate the decolonial potential of AIKSs, developing a case for Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum.

### **Theoretical framework**

This inquiry is informed by the Afrocentric Theory. Whilst Eurocentrism is a Western cultural bomb designed to annihilate the African worldview, epistemology (knowledge), and heritage, the Afrocentric Theory (whose synonyms are 'the Afrocentric cosmic view' or 'the Afro-centred paradigm' or 'Afrocentrism') is an antidote to Eurocentrism. Afrocentrism is not isolationism but thinking and acting African, *id est*, African centeredness. For Higgs and Van Niekerk (2003), "Afrocentrism is a response by African scholars to re-write the skewed history codified by colonisers so that Africans can systematically construct an understanding of an African reality by themselves for themselves" (p. 41). This liberatory inclination is endorsed by Okoye (2023), according to whom Afrocentrism seeks to reposition the African continent positively to enable Africans to achieve their development by themselves and for themselves. Africans, thus, needed to view reality from an Afrocentric worldview rather than treat everything Eurocentric as the truth. In the same vein, Dei (2012) argues that the Afro-centred paradigm is an important theoretical and pragmatic space for African peoples to interpret and critically reflect upon their experiences on their own terms and through the lenses of their worldviews and understandings, rather than being forced to understand the world through Eurocentric lenses.

Proponents of Afrocentrism, therefore, have embarked on a journey to replace Eurocentrism with the Afrocentric Theory by presenting Africa-Egypt (*Alkebulan-Kemet*) as the originator of world civilisation and knowledge (Okoye, 2023). They presented and continue to present Ancient Egypt (*Kemet*) as the cradle of epistemology, science, and mathematics (Okoye, 2023). Attempts by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831 A.D.) and like-minded rationalists to dissociate Egypt from what they deride as 'Africa proper' are noted. However, Egypt remains in Africa by Geography. The portrayal of Africans as the originators of world civilisation and knowledge (the

pith of Afrocentrism), thus, finds explanation and substantiation in the ‘African-Egyptian origins of Greek Philosophy’ (James, 2009; Wuta, 2023), grounded in the ‘Afrocentric Greek Dependency Theory’ (Okoye, 2023).

The Afrocentric Greek Dependency Theory maintains that the Greeks, who are erroneously regarded by omission or commission as the originators of Western civilisation and knowledge, were in actual fact taught and mentored by the Ancient Egyptians (Okoye, 2023). Likewise, James (2009) declares categorically that ‘Egyptians educated the Greeks’. According to Wuta (2023), the prominent Greek characters like Thales (Circa 640-600 B.C.), Pythagoras (Circa 582-500 B.C.), Socrates (469-399 B.C.), Plato (427-347 B.C.), Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), and Alexander of Macedon (356-323 B.C.) sailed to Egypt and listened to the Egyptian Mystery priests who preached the knowledge and wisdom contained in the Ancient Egyptian Mystery religious system.

In more specific terms, annals of history have it on good record that Aristotle and his students shuttled from Athens to Egypt, where they converted the Royal Egyptian Library into a Research Centre (Onyewuenyi, 2005; James, 2009). With the passage of time, Aristotle’s students transformed the Research Centre into a University. Eventually, the students of Aristotle compiled a vast body of scientific knowledge which they had gained from inquiry in Egypt and also from the oral instructions which they had received from the Egyptian Mystery Priests. It is these African-Egyptian teachings, knowledge, and wisdom that Aristotle and neophytes then called the history of Greek philosophy. Therefore, the loudly-touted Aristotelian philosophy is not pristine Greek philosophy but an extension of African-Egyptian philosophy. A related account deliberately mentions Aristotle’s student Alexander III of Macedon (affectionately dubbed Alexander the Great), “who, by an act of aggression, invaded Egypt in 333 B.C., and ransacked and looted the Royal Library at Alexandria and together with his companions carried off a booty of scientific, philosophic and religious books” (James, 2009, p. 109). This was a plunder of intellectual property amidst military conquest. Thus, “Greeks stole the legacy of the African continent and called it their own” (James, 2009, p. 2009). This explains the view that Greek (Western) philosophy is ‘*Stolen Legacy*’.

Africans are purported to have abandoned their own indigenous civilization, a bequest whose historical foundations are deeply entrenched in ancient Egypt and Nubia. This profound heritage is accentuated by the actuality that Egypt served as the crib of science, philosophy, and

mathematics (Okoye, 2023), while ancient Nubia, which is located in modern Sudan, in fact contains the world's highest number of pyramids, surpassing even Egypt (Brier, 2002). It is this Ancient Egyptian civilisation that the Greeks (Westerners) are reported to have stolen, tailored to suit their needs, and claimed to be theirs (Wuta, 2023). In the process, Westerners claimed ownership and authorship of the African heritage (Ancient Egyptian epistemology and science) so successfully that attempts to set the record straight have become and continue to be an uphill struggle. This is the genesis of Eurocentrism, which, as a cultural bomb premised on stolen African-Egyptian legacy, makes Africans see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement, and it compels them to want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves (Okoye, 2023), for instance, with the Occidental epistemologies (WKSs) rather than knowledge systems of their own (AIKSs). Yet AIKSs remain the epitome of African epistemology and bedrock of holistic African existentiality. Afrocentrism, therefore, challenges the Western-orchestrated coloniality of knowledge. The decolonial potential of AIKSs, therefore, is best understood and appreciated from this perspective of Afrocentrism.

### **Interrogation of available literature: Identifying knowledge gaps**

In her book *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Smith (1999) critiques Western research as a tool of imperialism that has historically marginalised indigenous knowledge. Smith urges the reclamation of indigenous knowledge and decolonisation, which involves reversing the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems and ensuring that they are central to research. Smith also advances indigenous agency, whose central goal is having indigenous peoples become the researchers, rather than merely the researched, which transforms research into a tool for self-determination. Although Smith's submissions are among some of the works that may have influenced policymakers in Zimbabwe, they manifest a geographical gap in knowledge since they are in the global context. The current inquiry, therefore, seeks to reflect on issues of a similar nature within the local Afro-Zimbabwean context, hoping to gather new, nuanced, and interesting insights.

At a regional level, philosophers of education seem to address the matters of AIKSs, decolonial agenda, and heritage-based education as isolated themes and disjointed issues. Authorities like Dei (2012), for instance, portray African Indigenous Knowledge as 'heritage knowledge', which suggests that AIKSs enhance the African culture-embeddedness of knowledge and hence they have

a decolonial inclination. Dei (2012), thus, interfaces AIKSs and decoloniality but falls short in linking the two with heritage-based education. Moreover, the fact that Dei's (2012) discussion is in the diasporic context exhibits a geographical gap in the literature, which the current paper seeks to address by reflecting on issues of a similar nature in Zimbabwe. The fact that Dei (2012) wrote almost a decade before the promulgation of Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 presents the current reflection with a temporal knowledge gap, which needs to be addressed through interrelating AIKSs with decoloniality in the purview of the topical HBE 5.0 curriculum.

In the context of neighbouring South Africa, Martinez-Vargas (2020) recognises the exigency of AIKSs in decolonising higher education research, transforming a traditional uni-versity into a pluri-versity. According to Martinez-Vargas (2020), the chances of success in transforming a uni-versity into a pluri-versity could be brightened through adopting practices that are "diverse in form and content, including knowledge systems historically excluded, but equally preserve those that, although imposed, should still be present for an ecology of knowledges" (p. 112). This evokes the thesis of hybridity, which urges the integration of AIKSs and WKSs, with the former occupying a larger portion in the curriculum. Martinez-Vargas (2020) further argues, "diversifying our practices as researchers and combining them with traditional research practices is the only way to promote a pluri-verse which is nurtured by diverse knowledge systems on our way towards decolonisation" (p. 112). Decolonisation, therefore, does not seek to expunge Western epistemologies, nor does it rest upon AIKSs only, but it harmonises with the thesis of hybridity. Being based in South Africa, Martinez-Vargas's (2020) discussion exhibits a geographical gap, which the current reflection seeks to bridge by estimating the decolonial acumen of AIKSs in the context of Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum.

In his local study targeted at re-evaluating Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0, Tarugarira (2024) proclaims that the said blueprint is a decolonial initiative aimed at reconfiguring the national education framework to foster indigenous-oriented creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration within universities and colleges. As Tarugarira (2024) urges a return to tradition, he, therefore, implicitly envisions and recognises the decolonial potential of AIKSs within Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 blueprint. His inquiry, however, is not substantially focused on the decolonial praxis of AIKSs, and hence it may not be exhaustive in this regard.

Drawing on preliminary data from a pilot study she conducted at five Zimbabwean universities, Garwe (2025) demonstrates how the HBE 5.0 model aligns with decolonial philosophies by contesting dominant Western epistemologies and promoting inclusive and culturally responsive teaching policies. Contesting dominant Western epistemologies hints at challenging the preponderance of WKSs. Promoting culturally responsive education policies implicates the agenda for fostering AIKSs. Consequently, Garwe (2025) highlights the numerous benefits resulting from the implementation of the HBE 5.0 model, especially through honouring local wisdom and place-based knowing. However, Garwe's (2025) study was not exhaustive in estimating the decolonial acumen of AIKSs, a gap which the current reflection seeks to address by delving deeper into the confluence of AIKSs and decoloniality within the purview of Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum.

### **Research methodology**

This article is predominantly a textual or documentary analysis as a form of secondary research. Documentary analysis is an interpretivist research design in which the researcher systematically examines existing documents or literature to extract meaningful data relevant to the driving concerns of the inquiry. According to Bowen (2009), documentary analysis is an efficient method that is less time-consuming and cost-effective as it requires data selection instead of data collection. Documentary evidence is available (since many documents are in the public domain), documentary analysis is unobtrusive (does not draw undue attention), and non-reactive (unaffected by the research process). It is for these reasons that documentary analysis was preferred ahead of other research designs. This paper, therefore, is a reflection on other people's literary works that include primary and secondary sources (journal articles, book chapters, and handbooks) which address the issue under scrutiny, *id est*, the decolonial potential of AIKSs within Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum.

### **Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKSs) untangled**

The word 'Indigenous' is derived from the Latin word '*indigena*', whose English equivalent is 'indigene', which is usually taken to mean 'native'. Indigenous, thus, refers to "the root of things; as something that is natural and in-born to a specific context or culture" (Msila, 2009, p. 311), something peculiar to a certain culture and inimitable to any other cultural milieu.

IK, therefore, depicts the kind of meaning-making or knowledge production or epistemology that is peculiar to any given locale. It is “knowledge that people in a given community developed, and continue to develop over time, and is based on experience often tested over centuries of use, adapted to the local culture and environment, which is ever-changing and dynamic” (Zengeya-Makuku, Kushure, Zengeya & Bhukuvhani, 2013, p. 447). IK, therefore, is home-grown but amenable to change. Mawere (2015) also views IK as a set of ideas, beliefs, and practices of a specific locale that has been used by its people to interact with their environment and other people over a long period of time. Hence, IK is perennialistic.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs) in general have also been defined as “the sum total of the knowledge and skills which people in a particular geographical area possess” (Shizha, 2010, p. 32). The abbreviation ‘IKSs’ is more of an umbrella term because there are IKSs unique to the USA, there are IKSs peculiar to the Scandinavian cultural landscape, there are IKSs inimitable to Australia, etcetera. In the Sub-Saharan context, therefore, there is a need to add ‘African’ as a prefix to ‘Indigenous Knowledge Systems’ so that it reads ‘African Indigenous Knowledge Systems’ abbreviated as AIKSs. AIKSs, therefore, incorporate combinations of epistemologies encompassing the technological, philosophical, social, economic, educational, legal, and governance systems of Africans (Msila, 2009). These systems are embedded in the history and culture of Africans, including their civilisation. AIKSs, thus, form the backbone of the social, economic, scientific, and technological identity of Africans (Msila, 2009).

### **Decoloniality: An antidote to coloniality**

Decoloniality (Decolonial Theory) underpins struggles against colonial legacies wreaking havoc in the lives of ex-colonised peoples in general and their education in particular. Decolonial theorists argue that colonial education systems not only marginalised Indigenous Knowledge Systems but also imposed epistemic violence, privileging Western ways of knowing and suppressing diverse knowledges (Garwe, 2025). Decolonial Theory emphasises the pursuit of epistemic justice, challenging entrenched power structures and promoting the validity and legitimacy of multiple knowledge systems (Garwe, 2025). Protagonists of the Decolonial Theory include Walter Mignolo, Frantz Fanon, William Dubois, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Kwame Nkrumah, and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, among others. The decolonial agenda targets the ‘triad of coloniality’, which subsumes the coloniality of ‘power’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘being’ (Ndlovu-

Gatsheni, 2015). Decoloniality, therefore, is the ‘how’ part of decolonisation as well as a process of liberation to unmask and reveal coloniality (residues of colonialism), and challenge its endurance across the three dimensions of power, knowledge, and being (Ranawana, 2023). It involves the whole process of unlearning the Western colonial ideologies. Decoloniality announces a broad ‘decolonial turn’ that involves the task of the very decolonisation of power, knowledge, and being.

Unlike the simple decolonisation movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, “decoloniality was and is aimed at setting afoot a new humanity free from racial hierarchisation and asymmetrical power relations in place since conquest” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 489). Decoloniality is more epistemological in outlook, whereas decolonisation is more political in flavour. Decoloniality, thus, challenges the colonial logic (the dark side of the Euro-North American-centric modernity) in general and coloniality of power in particular. This is substantiated by Maldonado-Torres (as cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015), who writes, “by decoloniality it is meant here the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geopolitical hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world” (p. 488). This insinuates that the decolonial agenda is wary of the racially or colonially induced injustice, inequality, inequity, and iniquity. The said agenda seeks to counteract the socio-politico-cultural subjugation of one race by the other. Decoloniality, therefore, is consistent with the Critical Race Theory, which views racism as a systemic phenomenon that needs to be challenged and counteracted. Decoloniality is replete with emancipatory predilections that make it relevant to the protracted African quest for self-determination.

Universities in Africa, for instance, continue to produce alienated Africans who are socialised into hating the Africa that produced them and liking Europe and America that hate them (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). These universities, therefore, manifest the coloniality of knowledge as they valorise Western epistemology. Decolonial theorists view Western epistemologies as deliberately designed to intellectually subjugate the ex-colonised peoples, annihilate their Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and thwart their heritage-based worldviews. It is this coloniality of knowledge that the decolonial agenda also seeks to challenge.

Decoloniality is a call for the democratisation, de-homogenisation, de-Westernisation, and de-Europeanisation of knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Democratisation of knowledge means availing equal knowledge-production opportunities for all peoples across the globe. De-homogenisation of knowledge is the drift from the universalisation of dominant epistemologies. De-Westernisation and de-Europeanisation of knowledge is a shift from the belief that Westerners and Europeans are the custodians of worthwhile knowledge worth being sought. Decolonial thinking, thus, conceives knowledge as an entitlement to all peoples; it is against the Western universalisation of knowledge, and it challenges the highly-sloganeered Western-European custodianship of knowledge. To Ranawana (2023), decoloniality rejects the possibility of the so-called Western universal truth, and hence it counteracts the coloniality of knowledge.

Decoloniality could also be understood as an opportunity for the formerly subjugated to relearn their knowledge that could have been pushed aside, forgotten, buried, or discredited by the forces of modernity, settler-colonialism, and racial capitalism. However, decoloniality is not a means to reject the scientific, medical, social, and ethical ‘advances’ of the modern era *tout court*. It is, rather, a cautious and sober way to explore colonisation, settler-colonialism, racial capitalism, modernity, and, most recently, neoliberalism and neo-capitalism, and how they have displaced an array of modes of living, thinking, and being in the subjugated peoples’ natural world. Decoloniality, therefore, aspires to restore, elevate, renew, rediscover, acknowledge, and validate the multiplicity of life experiences, culture, and knowledge of the indigenous and ex-colonised peoples to de-centre racial privilege. Above all, decoloniality attempts to reassert and validate the ex-colonised people’s humanity, thereby challenging the coloniality of being.

### **AIKSs and the decolonial agenda: Towards a genuinely Heritage-Based Education 5.0 curriculum**

AIKSs can serve as a basis on which another world outside the present Western-centric one can be imagined, and hence there are ways in which AIKSs can transform and/or lead to the decolonisation of knowledge within higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Ndlovu, 2014). Zimbabwe’s HBE 5.0 curriculum, therefore, is not an exception because its emancipatory vision is further capacitated by AIKS. Among the many methods by which AIKSs can be deployed to transform and decolonise curriculum and research is the deliberate attempt to privilege the African archive over the Western one when conducting research and developing content materials

for teaching purposes (Ndlovu, 2014). This suggests the need to privilege those sources of knowledge that carry subalternised views of the indigenous people of SSA in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Such will also require a practical step towards dealing with the politics of citation, where students and researchers can be encouraged to recognise those scholars who have privileged AIKSs above those who privilege WKSs (Ndlovu, 2014).

The decolonial agenda harmonises with critical pedagogy. “Critical pedagogy advocates for a shift from the ‘banking model’ of education, where teachers deposit knowledge into passive student minds, towards a dialogical approach” (Garwe, 2025, p. 3). Critical pedagogy, therefore, detests the traditional, monotonous, and disempowering lecture-assign-test-recite method dubbed the expert-disciple model of teaching. Critical pedagogy sets a premium on the dialogical approach as exemplified by Freire (2005), according to whom, a good education is ‘neither what A does to B nor what A does for B but what A does with B’. With their culture-embeddedness and decolonial inclination, AIKSs have the potential to foster this dialogical approach because they motivate student participation, emblematic of the highly cherished transactional learning. This finds explanation in the fact that recognition is readily given to what learners think, say, and do at home and in the community. With emphasis on ancestral wisdom and community engagement, students become active in class as they find their identities affirmed and cultural roots strengthened (Garwe, 2025). AIKSs, thus, serve to contextualise learning, thereby generating interest among students, which is consistent with the decolonial imperative of Zimbabwe’s HBE 5.0.

The focus of Zimbabwe’s HBE 5.0 on integrating ancestral wisdom and local knowledge aligns with what Garwe (2025) refers to as the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs) Theories – decolonial principles targeted at honouring local wisdom and place-based knowing. Based on these IKSs Theories, therefore, it becomes arguable that AIKSs create opportunities for students to voice their lived experiences, challenge dominant narratives, and co-create knowledge that addresses community needs and aspirations. With a strong anchor in AIKSs, Zimbabwe’s HBE 5.0 curriculum is strategically positioned to facilitate the recovery and redemption of the hitherto suppressed indigenous epistemologies, decolonising higher learning, and empowering students to reclaim their cultural heritage and utilise it for indigenous-oriented problem-solving and development (Garwe, 2025).

Garwe (2025) advances the ‘Endogenous Development Theory’, which underscores the importance of centering knowledge construction processes within the lived realities and priorities of local populations. The said theory posits that development initiatives should be driven by local values, aspirations, and knowledge systems, rather than externally imposed models. In resonance with this theory, which assumes a decolonial outlook, the HBE 5.0 framework emphasises endogenous development goals such as community engagement and fostering solutions relevant to Zimbabwean contexts (Wuta, 2022). AIKSs, therefore, needed to be brought to the epicentre of these purportedly endogenous development goals so that these goals become truly indigenous-oriented, culture-embedded, and decolonial in outlook. Incorporating AIKSs into Zimbabwe’s HBE 5.0 curriculum enjoins students to value multiple epistemologies beyond the dominant Western canon, towards *pluri-versality*, creating space for stakeholders to engage with their lived knowledge systems and contribute to solutions informed by their lived experiences (Garwe, 2025).

Findings in Garwe’s (2025) study show initial promise in Zimbabwe’s HBE 5.0 curriculum, serving to validate identities and knowledge pluralism through culturally responsive practices. In other words, the HBE 5.0 is capable of giving AIKSs the recognition that they are due, so that these culture-embedded epistemologies, in return, sharpen the decolonial vision of the said curriculum framework. The decolonial potential of AIKSs is seen in their ability to dismantle colonial-era structures by restoring the African identity, re-centering African worldviews, and fostering epistemic freedom. By reclaiming AIKSs, Zimbabwe’s HBE 5.0 can challenge Eurocentric paradigms in society, governance, health, and technology, promoting a more holistic and culturally relevant approach to development and well-being.

Strengthening cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging on the part of the HBE 5.0 curriculum readily aligns with decolonial aspirations, which can be amplified and magnified through the incorporation of AIKSs into the said curriculum framework. “This alignment is not just local; it resonates with global movements challenging colonial legacies and privileging indigenous knowledge systems” (Garwe, 2025, p. 13). The HBE 5.0’s focus on culturally responsive andragogies and pedagogies, thus, resonates with a global chorus of educational innovations (inclusive of the incorporation of AIKSs) that challenge the dominant Western epistemologies. Moreover, realising HBE 5.0’s emancipatory vision demands not just institutional commitment within Zimbabwe, but a global alliance united in their pursuit of decolonial and

culturally responsive learning (Garwe, 2025), which evokes the bringing of AIKSs to the epicentre of higher learning and training in accordance with the dictates of decoloniality.

To dismantle the colonial hangover in higher and tertiary education in Zimbabwe, the integration of AIKSs into HBE 5.0 could be expedited to replace vestiges of the Eurocentric Education 3.0 curriculum with a system that values indigenous languages and pedagogies, making education more relevant to learners' cultural backgrounds. To restore the Afro-Zimbabwean identity and sovereignty, the recovery and promotion of AIKSs in education are considered crucial, as these serve to reclaim and restore the indigenous identities, languages, and experiences lost or suppressed during colonialism. To challenge the Western knowledge hegemony in the HBE 5.0 curriculum, AIKSs could be deployed to offer alternative ways of knowing that can be used to critique and move beyond the assumptions embedded in WKSs. By tapping more into AIKSs, Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum can reduce dependence on external knowledge systems and develop solutions to local problems that are more sustainable and culturally appropriate. This is basically the promotion of self-determination.

Garwe (2025) views Zimbabwe's journey of HBE 5.0 as a testament to the transformative power of education, and a reminder that the symphony of decolonisation is still being composed. Hence, she urges:

Let its (HBE 5.0 curriculum) melodies weave into the broader symphony of learning, offering hope for a future where classrooms become sanctuaries for diverse voices, knowledge ecosystems flourish in their multiplicity, and education plays its role in dismantling colonial legacies and fostering a world where cultures thrive in harmonious exchange" (Garwe, 2025, p. 13).

This urges the expeditious incorporation of AIKSs into Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum as an exigency for the decolonisation of higher learning and attainment of the highly cherished ideal of *pluri-versality*. HBE 5.0's evolving composition, while still unfinished, has the potential to become a powerful anthem in the ongoing rendition of decolonial and culturally responsive education (Garwe, 2025). However, a cautious decolonial approach to Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum can create a dynamic "third space" that synthesises relevant elements of both AIKSs and WKSs, rather than simply rejecting one for the other. This encourages the hybridisation of ancient and modern knowledges in accordance with the ideal of *pluri-versality*.

## Conclusion

The process of decolonisation, as underpinned by the Decolonial Theory, requires a fundamental shift in mind-set both for individuals and institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe, *id est*, a shift away from internalised colonial values towards the re-learning and re-valuing of indigenous knowledge. AIKSs, thus, needed to be brought to the epicentre of endogenous development goals so that these goals become truly home-grown, culture-embedded, and decolonial in outlook. Integrating AIKSs into Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum, therefore, serves to indigenise, contextualise, and decolonise education and training towards heritage-based creativity, innovation and industrialisation. In fact, AIKSs strengthen and sharpen the decolonial potential and edge of Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum.

## Recommendations

1. This paper recommends that the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development (MoHTEISTD) formulate a clear and comprehensive policy framework tailored to guide and expedite the integration of AIKSs into Zimbabwe's HBE 5.0 curriculum with a view to advancing the decolonial agenda consistent with heritage-based innovation and indigenous-oriented industrialisation.
2. The paper urges universities and colleges to deliberately transform and decolonise research in an attempt to privilege the African archive over the Western one when developing content materials for teaching purposes.
3. The paper also encourages the Zimbabwe Government to escalate investment in research, documentation, and training (capacity building) to empower universities and colleges to embrace and promote AIKSs more effectively in pursuit of the decolonial project.

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