Infusion of indigenous knowledge into the teaching of ecotourism entrepreneurship

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Abstract

The discourse on homegrown knowledge has provoked a debate of larger-than-life proportions across the world over many years since the demise of colonialism. In Africa, especially in the sub-Saharan region, while the purportedly indigenous communities have always found worth in their own local forms of knowledge, the colonial administrations viewed indigenous knowledge as being unempirical, irrational, anti-developmental, and unchristian. The standing and status of indigenous knowledge has been transformed since the1997 Global Knowledge Conference in Toronto, which emphasised the pressing need to learn, preserve, and exchange indigenous knowledge. Student protests have been proliferating across South African universities since 2015 with students calling for free, quality, diverse and transformative decolonised education based on inter alia, indigenous African knowledge systems. This movement is not peculiar to Africa. It has reverberated to other parts of the globe such as New Zealand, England, Scotland, the USA and others, where students demand the removal of 'dead white men' from their curricula and call for the incorporation of indigenous and postcolonial thoughts and knowledge bases. This is not to say that best practices in curriculum creation from other parts of the globe should be ignored in entirety, but rather that African knowledge should be afforded its needed space. While the movement was initiated by academics decades ago, the actual transformation has been slow, because the minds of academics and physical spaces were conquered by the myths of superiority of whiteness and defeatist attempts of trying to dismantle the colonisers' structures using the same tools colonialists used to build the current structures. While the students are not sure what decolonisation of the curricula would entail, they know that they want universities to be relevant spaces of equal opportunities where they do not feel alienated from themselves and what is African in essence. The design used in this study was a cross-sectional case study where an *isangoma* (traditional healer who uses long-established methods passed down from one healer to another to treat an ailing person suffering from various illnesses, some of which have a psychological basis) conducted a lecture on her trade as an ancestral gift and source of livelihood. This lecture demonstrated that education and indigenous knowledge (IK) can indeed coexist in a modern and technological harmonious lecture room. A group of 118 second year ecotourism students attended the lecture and then completed a questionnaire soliciting their thoughts about the lecture and the infusion of IK into their curriculum. The study found that while the majority of them were skeptical at the beginning, they felt that they learnt a great deal about *ubungoma* (traditional healing) as a gift from the ancestors and that the lecture had cleared misconceptions and made them proud of their southern African culture.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, curriculum, indigenous knowledge, integration, ubungoma

Introduction

Student protests have been proliferating across South African universities with calls for 'free, quality, diverse and transformative decolonised education' (Etheridge, 2018; Pett, 2015). Swain (2019) and also Smith (2012), have pointed out that this movement is indeed not peculiar to Africa. It is a global phenomenon led by the Open University where students demand the removal of 'dead white men' and their values from the curricula and request the incorporation of indigenous and postcolonial thoughts and knowledges. Some authors such as wa Thiong'o (1981), Ghillar (2016), and also Francis and Hardman (2018) argue in favour of decolonising and liberating the minds of academics and the minds of the students, shifting from chiseling the students to fit like 'round pegs into square holes' of

Eurocentric, neo-colonial and racist universities and campuses that make them strangers in their own country and on their continent (Joseph, 2017:3; Fataar, 2018:vi; Keele University, n.d.).

Universities have to start by defining decolonisation, then rid themselves of procedures, values, norms, practices, thinking, beliefs and choices that elevate American and European cultures by contextualising knowledge and skills in Africa first, then look outward to a globalised world (DEFSA). Charles Eliot, former Harvard University President, posits that 'universities must grow from seed' and not be prototyped from foreign countries. Knight (2018) talks about the development of a creative third space between the two poles of Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism where multiple centres of knowledge can interplay and enrich each other. The Keele University Manifesto for decolonising the curriculum, states that decolonisation is not simply integrating some authentic African knowledge system into the curriculum, but challenging the colonial systems, structures and relationships in order to come up with new centres of knowledge and ways of knowing (Darwin, 2016) with increased need to (Mawere, 2015) learn, preserve, and exchange indigenous knowledge. In agreement, Wingfield (2017) views decolonisation as the radical overthrow of the existing system to allow the custodians to define education for themselves around the desired ways of knowing to include (Murris, 2016) knowledges that have been omitted, forgotten and ignored. Contrary to this view, Etheridge (2018) argues that decolonisation is rather about inclusivity, looking at the holistic picture of local, national, regional and international knowledges, rather than 'chucking out everything that has been working and replacing it with something else'.

Students strive to reclaim physical spaces by ridding them of colonial structures (Joseph, 2018), hence the #RhodesMustFall to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes that towered over their spaces as metaphoric omnipresence of colonial theories, ideologies, histories, art, sciences, etc. that continue to mythologise whiteness (Pett, 2015), alienating and dispossessing them of their own history, land, culture, identity, voice, thoughts, dignity, archeology, and right to self-determination (Durie, 2004; Smith & Wobst, 2005; Maunganidze, 2016) in lecture rooms that perpetuate inequalities (Shay, 2016) through the use of methodologies and practices that may not be relevant to a global African university of today (The Conversation 2017) and expressed in the following way:

"Getting a degree at UCT is a form of mental slavery and colonialisation. We can no longer breathe! We want to breathe! We must exorcise the colonial ghost from the curriculum. We want relevant knowledge, we want to study African history, we want to reclaim our black history" (Luckett, 2016:416).

Figure 1. Space and curriculum decolonisation protests
Source: Ratcliffe (2015)

Theoretical framework and literature review

Dossani (2018) defines colonialism as theft that is legitimised and optimised through restructuring and eroding the way of thinking, way of knowing and operation of societies, making the people (Ngugi, 2005:3) 'see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement' that they want to distance themselves from, which leads to (Mda, 2011:156) self-alienation propagated by (Nyamnjoh, 2017) narrative manipulation against selves and (Joseph, 2018) 'symbolically' castrating 'everything African and indigenous'. Decolonisation is a reversal thereof, the process of taking back control of a country, resources and knowledges that were subjugated through (Lebeloane, 2018) re-instatement, re-inscription and embodiment of dignity and social justice in people whose value systems were violently eroded during hostile takeovers.

Much as some of the students are very keen to engage in this debate and see elements of decolonisation and IK embedded in the fabric of their curricula, they tragically rely on academics whose minds, ways of life and even origins are colonial. As Ruddock (2018) argues, knowledge is generated by particular groups to serve particular purposes, if we are not critical about knowledge, we risk becoming pawns to colonialists and neo-colonialists that cannibalise on and take ownership of knowledge systems of people they know and feel nothing about (Smith & Wobst, 2005) as we accept as universal truths what that group feeds us about ourselves.

Heleta (2016) posits that 25 years after the first democratic elections in South Africa, epistemologies and knowledge systems remain rooted in western, Eurocentric colonial traditions. The decoloniality debate in the country is older than two decades, but it has not yielded any curricula and methodological changes, which has led to the students taking the movement upon themselves to dismantle the structures of colonialism in HE due to frustration about (Costandius & Blitzer, 2015; Murris, 2016; Francis & Hardman, 2018) the slow pace of transformation while they continue to suffocate (Joseph, 2018) under the practices that are no longer fit for purpose and the new era in which they live.

Ruddock (2018) proposes grounding education on more than one centre of knowledge and ways of knowing, such as Africa-centric epistemologies and philosophies like 'South African-ubuntu, Tanzanian-ujamaa (equal opportunity), Hindi-akama (virtuous), Hindu/Buddhism-kharma (aura)' (Waghid, Waghid & Waghid, 2018; Fataar, 2018) without lowering the standards that people set for themselves after benchmarking. Contrary to Joseph's (2018) argument that the students themselves do not know what decolonisation of their curricula means, nor exactly what they want, Nyathi (2017) cites an African student studying in the UK arguing that we should strive for both worlds as opposed to either/or. 'If there is African indigenous knowledge out there – then yes, I want more of it. If a western scientist has the cure for cancer – then yes, I want that too'. This statement by a student dispels William's (2016) argument of decolonisation as 'philistine rejection of knowledge' on the basis of gender and skin colour. Decolonisation of the curricula is not about abandoning tradition and universality, as it is about resuscitating what those 'giants' whose shoulders students are forced to stand on, castrated in order to instil their own values.

The conceptual framework for this paper was derived from the following key words which were central to the questions the students responded to: ecotourism, curriculum, decolonisation, indigenous knowledge, integration and technology in search for ways of integration of technology in the drive to incorporate indigenous knowledge in the ecotourism curriculum and (Darwin, 2016) making the offerings inclusive of many ways of being in South Africa (in the case of this study) and the world by (Shay, 2016) allowing diverse views and leveling power plays, which have tended to and in many ways still do dominate African cultures.

The falling of statues, flags and fees will soon be followed by the falling of academics who want to maintain the *status quo* and continue to act as reminders of (Matebeni, 2018) 'how and for whom the university was designed' by protecting the statues that continue to glorify and immortalise colonialists as heroes. Ahmed (2019) argues that the #MustFall movement is not only about the removal of statues

and fees, but the first step towards radical decolonisation of UCT in particular. Msezane (Figure 2) depicts the Chupungu, a statue of the legendary bird that was allegedly misappropriated from Zimbabwe by Cecil Rhodes, taking the pedestal as Rhodes fell (Knusen, 2019) demytholising all he stood for. Decolonisation of the curricula will require academics that are prepared to unlearn in order to re-learn in a site of multiple ecologies of knowledge and ways of knowing (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, n.d.: 21) shifting from the epistemologies that were meant to alienate students from who they essentially are to some distant selves that they should aspire to be. Academics need to understand the dominant features of the current curricula including 'white, male, western, capitalist, heterosexual, Eurocentric' (Shay, 2016), apartheid and urban to mention a few, and be willing and prepared emotionally and otherwise to shift and present balanced curricula that will cater for a new different student who is black, rural, female, bisexual, homosexual, underprepared, poor, etc.

Figure 2. Drama student, Sethembile Msezane as Cecil Rhodes fell at UCT in April 2015
Source: Shoemaker (2015)

Fataar (2018) points out that departments, programmes and course modules, I might add industry and local custodians of IKS and African philosophies, would be instrumental in identifying other centres to root knowledge and epistemologies on to allow for (Padayachee, Matimolane & Ganas, 2018) different modes and forms of knowledge and knowing.

Ecotourism in the debate

Ecotourism as a growing niche area of tourism, is responsible travel to natural and pristine areas that conserves the environment, wildlife, ecosystems, cultural heritage, history, archaeology, etc. while enhancing the well-being of local communities (TIES, 2015; Dudovskiy, 2014) who are (Hlengwa & Maruta, 2019) the custodians of these resources mainly through community based tourism (CBT). This niche area of tourism which represented 11.4% of all consumer spending (ITHSA, 2017) involves environmentally friendly and responsible visits to exotic, fragile and low impact areas, to support conservation efforts while sustaining and respecting the cultural heritage of the host communities (Bricker, 2013; Dudovskiy, 2014) as an essential component of products and tour packages (Steele-Prohaska, n.d.). Indigenous knowledge is inherent in field guiding in ecotourism, but conspicuously missing from the 'colonial' lecture room. Koopman (2018) defines indigeneity as an identity that unifies survivors of genocidal attempts, while Vuk'uzenzele (2011) sees it as local knowledge gained over generations that defines the existence and uniqueness of a given culture and community. Whelan (2013) posits that ecotourism can be used to conserve cultural traditions and roots that otherwise

could be lost due to disuse especially because ecotourists search for authentic environmental and cultural wonders that are threatened by westernisation.

Nicolaides (2015) posits that feminism is also an important aspect requiring attention in African curricula, which is particularly significant considering the role played by women in modern politics in general and the movement under discussion in this paper in particular:

> Africa's current problems are to a very large extent the by the products of the inhuman slave-trade that existed on the East and West coasts of the continent, the destruction of traditional values by colonialism and alien religions, apartheid, neocolonialism and globalization. Women in Africa have a great role to play in the recapturing of traditional African cultural values in which they are appreciated as women and where they complement men as they used to centuries ago. In such a quest, popular feminism has the far greater attraction for especially many African women who regarded their culture as a critical aspect guiding their identity. This is what they grew up to believe and be familiar with. Western style feminism is thus generally insufficient for the particular concerns of African women. African culture is heterogeneous and needs to be carefully considered if African problems are to be solved, and feminism is a critical aspect requiring attention (2015: 203-204).

Indigenous knowledge therefore has a central place in a decolonised ecotourism curriculum and lecture room as a drive to curb (Johnston, 2000) exploitation, gender disparity, dislocation, desecration and disrespect firstly by students and then by tourists. Each indigenous community has a few sages, who have reached a (New World Encyclopedia, 2016) 'high level of knowledge and understanding of their culture's world view' that safeguard the community's philosophies, history, amasiko, IK, etc. and pass them down to younger generations (Oruka, 1990), and could thus be consulted and invited as co-curricula developers, advisors and guest lecturers. Ecotourism as a field of study integrates global environmental issues, responsible tourism, pro-poor tourism, sustainable tourism development, adventure tourism, marine tourism, field guiding, indigenous knowledge, cultural tourism, and others (Bricker, 2013; TIES, 2015; ITHSA, 2017).

Methodology

As a lecturer for ecotourism entrepreneurship, the researcher included in the curriculum some aspects of IK as a way of embracing the decoloniality debate taking place at the university and supported by the position paper on decolonisation. This was not very hard to do because ecotourism by design consists of aspects of IK as defined. The first lecture was conducted by an indigenous guest lecturer (*isangoma-singular*) to share (The Conversation, 2017) 'powerful knowledge' and business aspects of her gift (despised by many including students) in the bid to refrain from (Pett, 2015) reproducing the narratives absorbed as a student and teacher in a colonialist era. *Isangoma* was selected as the first guest lecturer because they (*izangoma-plural*) 'remain firmly entrenched at the apex of the hierarchy of African Traditional Medicine' and culture (Ogana and Ojong, 2015). The researcher had to start by preparing the students for what was to come, sharing with them some of the texts they may not have read and explaining the importance of being balanced as a graduate firmly grounded in the culture of origin. It was also crucial to review the learning outcomes and include some outcomes directed at indigenous knowledge to ensure that the practice is sustainable. The approach was deductive starting with conceptualisation and theorising followed the lecture and qualitative data collection from a group of 118 second year students. Waghid *et al* (2018) posit that grounding teaching and learning on African philosophies, leads to reflective and open learning that opens up room for construction and reconstruction of education due to the fusion of disparate knowledge systems.

The lecture covered among others: origins of *ubungoma*, *ubungoma* as a gift from ancestors, *ubungoma* as a business (purchase of stock, pricing, saving money, sustainability and viability of business), practices - showing some herbs and what they are used for, technologies used, education, networking, trends and the future of *ubungoma*. What was interesting was that *isangoma* herself was an educated former teacher embracing both the cultural and indigenous, and modern and technological practices. Data were collected by recording of questions and answers and questionnaires at the end of the lecture. Analysis was done using both qualitative and quantitative data representation tools. The findings of this paper are propositions that can be adapted and applied to other similar situations but they are not generalisable because the study was case and cross-sectional by design (Leshem, 2019).

Findings

The researcher asked the question about where the students came from because it was important in determining the probability of meeting and interacting with *izangoma* as they are mainly found in the rural areas. Figure 3 illustrates that the majority of the students came from rural areas. It was therefore puzzling that almost all of them claimed to have had no interaction with *izangoma* in the past.
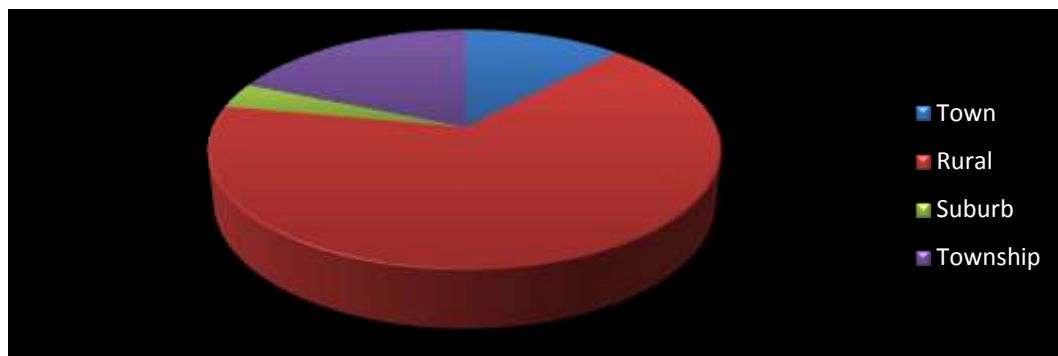

Figure 3. Places of origin of the students

The first question was followed by determination of the feelings and perceptions towards *izangoma*. It yielded a number of interesting, but expected responses considering that such knowledge has been excluded in the colonial classrooms as well as lecture rooms.

As illustrated on Figure 4, which is the cause and effect diagram, colonisation made the majority if not all of the students Christian. Consequently, their upbringing enforced other cultures on them making them look down upon their own culture, not believing in anything cultural, not performing any cultural rituals, and even frowning on having an *isangoma* in their lecture room. They also lacked or claimed to lack understanding of what *izangoma* do, stating that they are people possessed by demons and evil spirits (very typical of Christian and Islamic teachings). They also brought about a number of perceptual reasons for not interacting with *izangoma* such as that they are dirty, they cause stress, they are witches, and that they did not trust them at all.
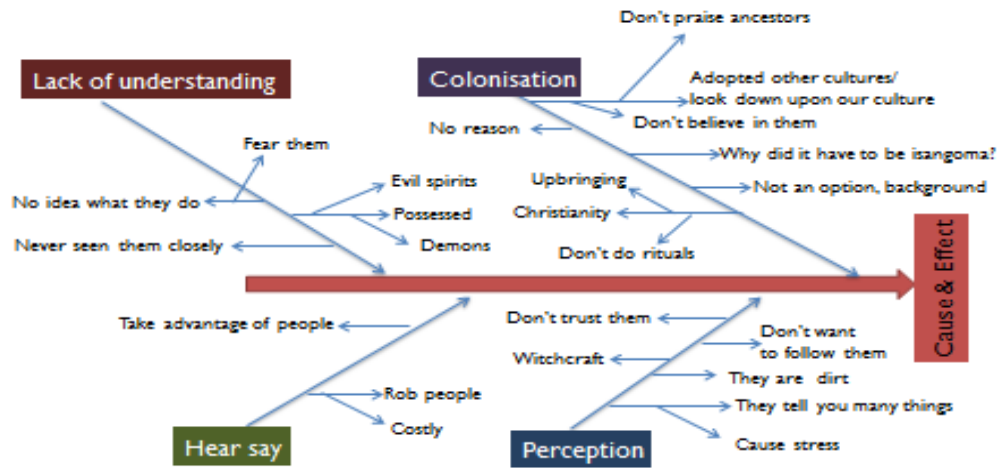
Figure 4. Reasons for no interaction with izangoma

It was crucial to determine the thoughts and feeling of the students after the lecture, as the researcher stated in the methodology section, given by an educated *isangoma*, who was able to integrate technology into the lecture and control them as a qualified teacher usually does. Figure 5 shows a complete turnaround in their responses when compared with the responses they gave in Figure 4. Within just 2 hours, they had a better understanding of what *izangoma* do, they learnt something about their culture, they felt good about the lecture, they thought that it was very informative, interesting, enjoyable and made them proud of their heritage.

Figure 5. Thoughts and feelings about izangoma after the lecture

Figure 6 captured the lessons that the students learnt from the lecture. As illustrated they were grouped into cultural, perceptual and entrepreneurial lessons. Cultural lessons included learning about the importance of their culture and ancestors, learning about who they are and where they come from, instilled pride and love for their traditions and knowledge that their ancestors are actually not demons. They learnt that *ubungoma* is a gift from ancestors that should not be taken lightly. They also learnt that *izangoma* are chosen powerful people who embrace their culture. They also learnt that *ubungoma* is not such a bad thing as *izangoma* help heal others for example.

It was important to note that the students felt there was no need to judge and undermine them, especially because the campus hosts quite a number of students who are also *izangoma*. The lecture also taught them that *ubungoma* is a gift that people use as a source of livelihood, especially because

the guest lecturer showed them pictures of her home and car and stated that she had left teaching to embrace her African based calling.
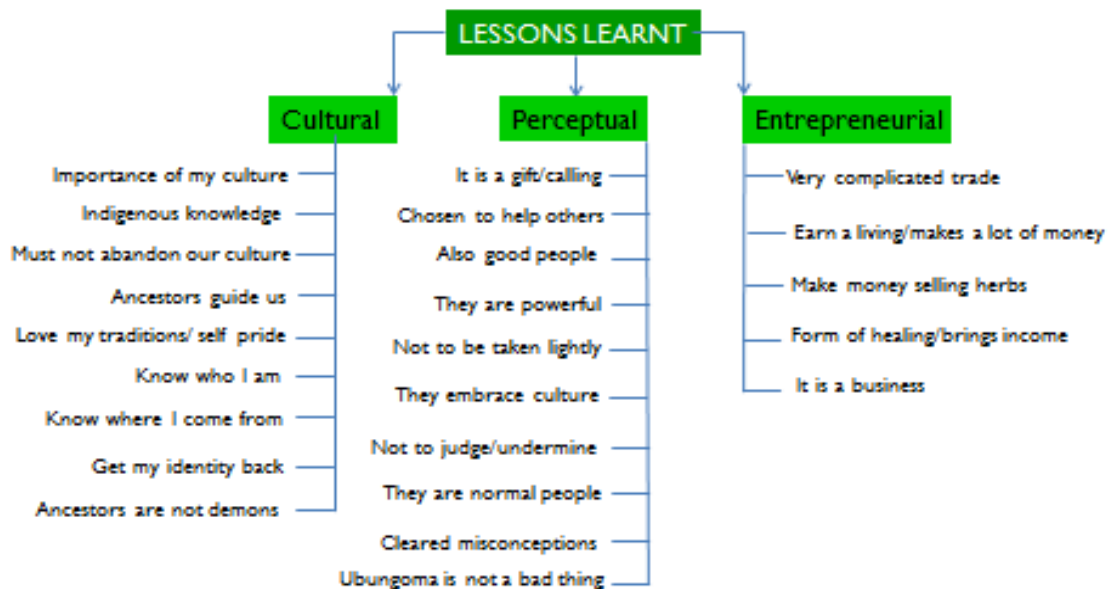

**Figure 6: What did this lecture teach you?**

The lecture in progress in one of the high-tech venues on campus. The guest lecturer was able to prepare for the lecture and use technology to present information on her traditional trade.

Figure 7. The IK lecture in progress in a state of the art lecture room

The last question addressed the issue of whether the students thought there was a place for IK in higher education. An overwhelming majority of 82 of 118 felt that there was a place for IK in higher education, with just about 8 of 118 thinking that there was no place.
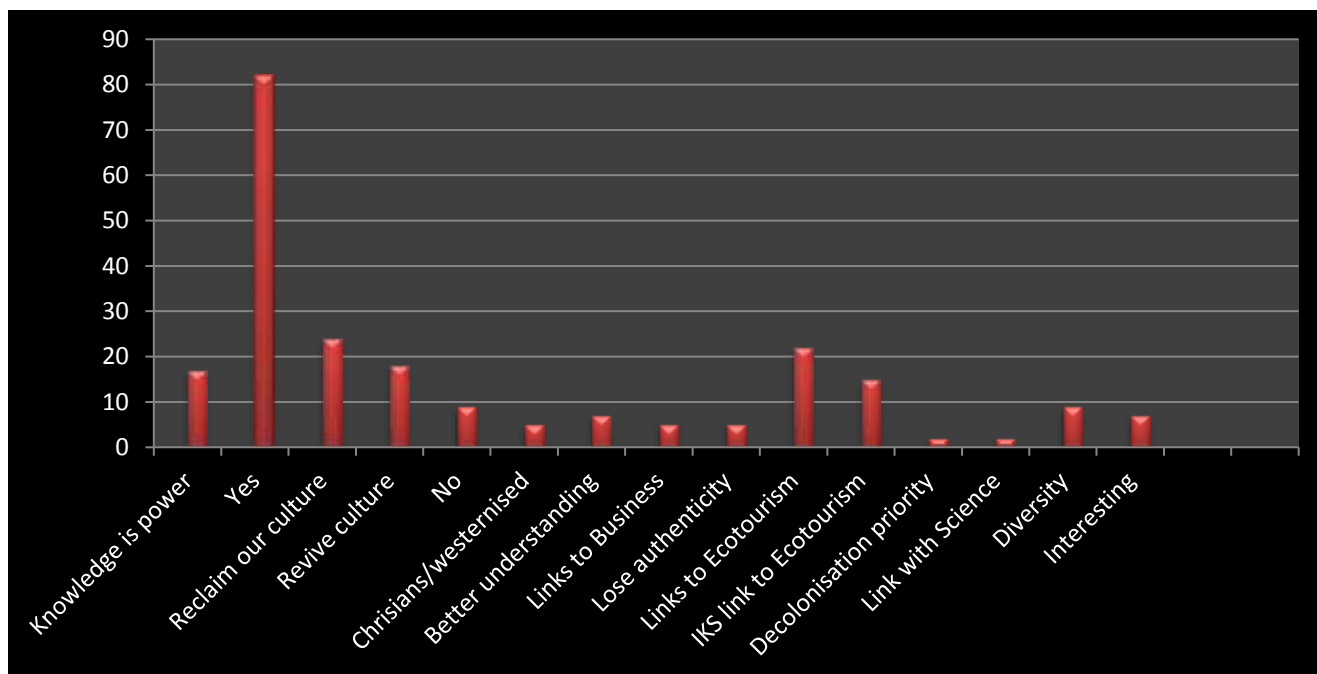
Figure 8. Place of IK in higher education

Those who felt that there was a place for the proceedings gave such reasons as reclamation and revival of culture, there are links with ecotourism, knowledge is power, it brings about diversity thus making education interesting. Those who felt that there was no place for IK in higher education were of the view that teaching about it would make it lose its authenticity (they must have misunderstood the question), and others were westernized and Christian and thus opposed to the notions put forward.

Conclusion and propositions

Students have been deprived of other ways of knowing as the methodologies and philosophies as well as paradigms, have remained Eurocentric and western in orientation. The lecture rooms have maintained the 'hostility and oppressive' tendencies, as the dreams sold by 1994 1st democratic elections in SA remained dreams for 25 years.

The '#MustFall' framework is regarded by Chikane (2018) as a blueprint for radical change that will precede the '#MustRise' of new voices, ideologies and debates in the decolonised lecture room, a lecture room where students will respond to lectures with such words as: 'enlightening, interesting, honoured to have been part of it, earned back my identify, powerful, happy I was there, great pleasure, felt good, made me so very proud, nice experience, loved it, awesome, exciting stuff, I have never experienced something like this before.' These were some of the responses the researcher got from the lecture group, which was a journey she is proud of having initiated in the department.

When embarking on this type of thought-provoking journey:

- It is important to tread carefully and guard against over ambition,

- Start with small, but important, interesting and knowledge-packed activities that relate to the module,

- If there are no synergies, it is better not to force it because it would be tragic to look back a few years later and see a different kind of wasteland of skills and knowledge regression.

- Give relevant background that will clarify the significance of the lecture and make them realise that you are responding to what the students themselves initiated,

- Ensure that they know what the lecture 'plugs into' to avoid total confusion,

- Ask them how they felt about it afterwards and what they would like to see happen in the future,

- Start by using knowledgeable guest lecturers who are vibrant, up-to-date and able to deal with students' many questions,

- Space such activities apart to give them time to recover from the initial surprise,

- Subtly integrate elements of the first lecture into subsequent lectures, such as for example the philosophy of *Ubuntu,*

- Relevant outcomes should be included in the module descriptor and study guide to ensure relevance and sustainability on Africanisation initiatives.

The lectures that will follow will include subsistence farmers, sculpture-makers, bead-makers, traditional dancers and singers, weavers and other traditional forms of businesses, which will hopefully show the students that entrepreneurship and IK do interface and that modern technology can be used to improve the African original old skills and also promote Africanisation.

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