



Revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge Practices through Education: Implementation of Wolayta Indigenous Knowledge in Grade Seven

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Abstract

Indigenous Knowledge, rooted in generations of experience and cultural heritage, holds immense potential to enrich teaching methodologies by emphasizing community-centered, ecological, and experiential learning. The purpose of the article is to examine the process of classroom implementation of Wolayta indigenous knowledge practices in grade seven. The data were collected from 6 schools, viz., Aratu Sake, Tora-offore, Dimtu, Shinka, Wamura, and Kindo-Gocho, located in three districts, namely, Damot Woyde, Diguna Fango and Kindo Didaye. Data were collected in 2021 and 2022 from the above-mentioned districts and schools. Classroom observation checklist was developed and classroom observations were conducted in each of the selected schools twice. The main purpose of the interview was to find out what kinds of efforts were being made to revitalize the indigenous knowledge in grade 7. The findings show that both teachers and students are not that aware of the importance of the indigenous knowledge of the Wolayta language classroom because of poor self-esteem and lack of teachers' background knowledge. The findings further underscore the need for Wolayta language teachers to master knowledge and pedagogical tools that help raise the relevance of the indigenous knowledge systems to students and community, and the need for policy reform and institutional support to ensure and foster culturally responsive pedagogy and sustainable learning practices into modern pedagogy.

Keywords: Wolayta, indigenous knowledge, revitalization, classroom, grade seven

1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge is a type of 'native knowledge that contains the complex set of technologies improved and sustained by the indigenous community' (Battite, 2002: 2), and gained from a long term practice, informal, oral, culturally based, locally known, undocumented,

emanating from community members and community resources. From a functional point of view, indigenous knowledge is used to find lasting solutions to economic, political and social challenges. Put differently, indigenous knowledge incorporates technologies and practices used for their continuation, survival and adaptation in the changing environment. It is acquired through observation, recording, physical participation, and verbal and visual networks, and passed from generation to generation through history, song, expression, faith and other means (Widdowson 1983). The primary function of these transmission networks is to mobilize the community in everyday life (Teklehaymanot, 2007).

From a formal perspective, indigenous knowledge system is useful in re-enacting history, preserving personality and dignity, and informing younger generation about self and cultural development and stimulating their interest in the acquisition of the indigenous knowledge learning. Since much of the indigenous knowledge remains intangible, and transmitted through oral mechanisms, it is highly liable to disappearance caused by man-made and natural dynamics. The saddest part is that once a piece of indigenous knowledge disappears without documentation, it is lost irrecoverably. Currently, there are so many communities around the world whose cultures are endangered, calling for immediate revitalization activities.

Since the late 20th century, the debate about the recognition and acceptance of indigenous knowledge by academics and policymakers has created an interest in research related to the relevance of this knowledge in several political and educational sectors (Silva, *et. al*, 2024). The integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into modern teacher education to foster culturally responsive pedagogy and sustainable learning practices. Indigenous Knowledge, rooted in generations of experience and cultural heritage, holds immense potential to enrich teaching methodologies by emphasizing community-centered, ecological, and experiential learning (Harkishan, 2025). One of the strategies of revitalizing endangered indigenous knowledge systems is incorporating the indigenous knowledge practices into the education system. In this way, indigenous knowledge is very important as it is culture, the history, the language and the existing knowledge that makes a nation. Those are the things that make a community different from other communities. Our teaching and learning process will be effective, and, in the end, our society will benefit from it. What is more, when we incorporate what we know and practice on a daily basis into our native language curriculum, we can achieve

effective learning, express and train, and have a good teaching and learning process by practicing indigenous games, stories, songs, and other indigenous knowledge in the classroom. Incorporating indigenous sports into teaching and learning also helps students gain self-confidence, self-awareness and strong classroom engagement and contribute to a healthy lifestyle and students' academic achievement (Battiste, 2002).

Indigenous learning, student-centered games, youth innovators, moral and problem-solving make them appreciate the history of their intimates in their own language, games, and physical activity (UNESCO, 2005). Moreover, the inclusion of the indigenous knowledge systems and practices into the school curriculum, and using the native languages to transmit the indigenous knowledge builds personal dignity, preserve culture, and increase the knowledge and identity of the people (Woolman, 2004). One historical fact that contributes to this idea is that the way Europeans built their people in the past has to do with their native language and literature (Crystal, 1997).

African scholars have also expressed the need for the incorporation of African indigenous knowledge and languages into their education system. For instance, Odora, *et. al.* (2001) state that many Africans, both before and after independence, widely expected that education should be rooted in their own rich cultural heritage and values for the benefit of African society. Along this line, Bushin (2007) expressed that schools should use African languages properly and preserve and transmit the culture and values of the people.

Modern education often prioritizes Western-centric knowledge systems, which can marginalize Indigenous perspectives and practices. Integrating IKS into teacher education not only enriches the curriculum but also supports culturally inclusive and sustainable educational practices. Such integration encourages critical thinking, ecological awareness, and respect for cultural diversity. This article aims to examine the inclusion of Wolayta indigenous knowledge systems into current education practices and approach intended to revitalize the weakening practices of the IKS, identify gaps in the incorporation of indigenous wisdom into pedagogy, and propose strategies for the effective integration of IKS into teacher training programs.

In the teaching-learning process, when teachers add stories to their language classes, the motivation for learning among the students is also great and contributes to making them think positively about their results. For example, the use of puzzles and jokes in the classroom can

greatly contribute to the learning of young students. If students learn from oral narratives and traditional history, they become a self-aware generation with sufficient knowledge of what they learn. Tales are also very crucial in the indigenous knowledge transmission through formal education. For instance, according to Banda & Morgan (2013), tales are told to help students understand the environment in which they live. Meshesha (2014) argues that such time tested indigenous knowledge values should be included in the curriculum and be part of language learning at all grade levels.

Ethiopia is a multilingual and multicultural country. It hosts over eighty ethnic groups. One of them is Wolayta. They live in the southern part of the country. They have their own set of folklore, dances, tales, parables, and riddles. In these indigenous disciplines, multidisciplinary issues are addressed. For example, a reckoning process is performed by heroes when one meets certain requirements. That is, he killed dangerous wild animals, such as lions, buffalos, leopards and so on. The benefits of the above-mentioned rituals for the Wolayta people have been passed from generation to generation only verbally.

The statement of the study is the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems and their practices in the Ethiopian education system. This is because existing realities and trends of incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems and their practices in the Ethiopian education system still shows the presence of significant gaps. Wolayta is not an exception. The purpose of this article is to examine the process of classroom implementation of the Wolayta indigenous knowledge systems and practices in grade seven. Data were collected from 6 schools, viz., Aratu Sake, Tora-offore, Dimtu, Shinka, Wamura and Kindo-Gocho, located in three Wolayta zone districts, namely, Damot Woyde, Digunafango and Kindo Didaye.

Data for this article were collected in 2021 and 2022 from the above-mentioned districts and schools. This article is organized into six sections. Following the introduction, the description of the study area is presented in Section two. Section three treats methods and materials used for data collection. Section four describes the analyses of the data. Section five provides the concluding remarks. The last section presents policy implications based on the findings of the study.

2. STUDY AREA AND METHODS

2.1 Description of the study area

The Wolayta are predominantly settled agriculturalists living in the southern part of Ethiopia. They produce different types of sorghums, root crops, false banana, cassava, yam, etc. They also rear cattle, goats and sheep. The landscape of the Wolayta zone accommodates three different climate zones: highland, midland and lowland. These different climate zones require different knowledge systems for agriculture, and other forms of indigenous knowledge practices.

The majority of the Wolayta speakers live in Wolayta zone, one of the twelve zones of South Ethiopia Region State. Wolayta Sodo Regiopolis is the main city of the zone. It's located at 330 km south of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Wolayta zone is densely populated: 1200/km². According to CAS (2021), the total population of the Wolayta language speakers is projected at 6,142,063.

The name 'Wolayta' is used to refer to the people, language and land. The zone is bordered with the Gamo zone in the south, Gofa zone in the southwest, Dawro zone in the west, Kambata zone, Tambaro Special District and Hadiya zone in the northwest, Oromia National Regional State, and Sidama National Region State in the northeast.

The people are known for their rich indigenous knowledge that includes folktales, riddles, songs, dances and hand crafts. These intangible heritages contain wisdoms on social cohesion, morality, human-environment relations, spirituality, work ethics, etc.

2.2 Research Methodology

This study employed mixed approaches. The qualitative approach was used for this study because the nature of the issues investigated requires qualitative information. This section describes the methods used to collect data for the study. Textbooks were consulted to examine the extent to which they contain the indigenous knowledge systems in their content. The qualitative information was gathered through open-ended questions. Such questions are essential because they are provided to informants in order to collect information to better understand and respond to the needs of the study; the community's values, culture, knowledge, beliefs, etc. (Dornyei, 2007).

Information was gathered from teachers because they play a vital role in maintaining the quality of education and in educating generations. In this regard, teachers who teach the Wolayta language as a mother tongue was selected through purposive sampling for class room observation. The teachers were observed during teaching in the class room and asked to explain the number of passages in the textbooks intended to teach indigenous knowledge and how to apply indigenous knowledge content through checklist. The data were collected from six teachers as study participants.

Two data collection tools were used for this study: observation and interview. The researcher conducted two classroom observations in each of the selected schools. In other words, a total of six classroom observations were conducted. The classroom observations were facilitated in consultation with teachers in order to learn how indigenous knowledge is applied to the Wolayta language classroom. Waxman, *et. al* (1997) state that classroom observations focus on effective learning and teaching. This is because classroom observation is not a set of questions and interviews designed for research purposes, but that it is a mechanism in a natural setting and is more appropriate to compare things.

Interview is the main data collection tool in this study (Cohen *et. al.*, 2000). It helps to bring out the issues in people's minds. Interview is also preferred because it allows the researcher to communicate with the study subjects in person, not on paper (Cohen, *et. al.*, 2000; Marczyk, *et. al.*, 2005). The interviewer and the respondents are also emotionally engaged, allowing each other to understand and protect each other's feelings. Interview was held with six native language teachers of all observed classroom. The main purpose of the interview was to find out what kinds of efforts are being made to revitalize the Wolayta indigenous knowledge in grade seven.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data from class observation was analyzed in this section. Six schools were selected from the three districts of Wolayta zone. The names of the districts and schools, and the dates when the classroom observations were conducted are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Names of the districts and schools selected for the study

	Name of district	Name of school
1	Damot Woyde	Schools A and B
2	Diguna Fango	Schools C and D
3	Kindo Didaye	Schools E and F

The importance of Wolayta's awakening is not only to teach the native language but also to the nation's identity and existence. Other symbolic expressions of social cohesion and personal integrity can also be added. Consider, for example, the following expressions (I use the Wolayta words according to the convention of writing the language in order to benefit the native readers of this article, and contribute to the standardization of the language):

- (1) a. *turay corattidi tuussaa gooches*
vines many pillar of house pull
"The unity of vines pull the pillar of a house"
- b. *tumay xoosasi bayra na'aa*
truth God for elder son
'Truth is the eldest son of God'
- c. *tumawunne cuwawu kiyiyosay xayenna*
truth.and smoke outlet have.not
'There is always an outlet for truth and smoke'

The proverb in (1a) indicates that unity is power, and that it is built in the nature of humans to work together. Similarly, the proverbs in (1b-c) indicate righteousness. This implies the former one tells us that God loves those who work in truth as his elder son whereas the later tells us that truth always win at its final stage like a smoke penetrates any outlet, whatever strong the conspiracy is. People equate truth with smoke for its penetration power. It is spoken in the context of encouraging a person to insist on true deeds.

Classroom observation checklist was developed and classroom observations were conducted in the three schools. Classroom observations in the schools are analyzed in detail below. One of the class observations were guided by observation checklist. The items in the checklist were framed in the form of questions. Accordingly, the first question was, "Does the teacher first tell stories and riddles to the students as a brain storming activity before the lesson?" During the classroom

observation in six different sessions, of course they tell the stories and riddles, but the first four of the six teachers did not understand the message of the indigenous knowledge that was to be

told to students. During the classroom observations, the teachers first presented stories, riddles, and other indigenous knowledge so that the students could relate them to the contextual message in the community. For example, the riddle in (2) was told and students were asked the meaning of words the like “gilqqiya, gixxishin”. But the central message of the story is “perfection is the enemy of meeting the deadline.

(2) *gilqqiya gixxishin giyay laalettes*

gilqqiya gixxishin giyay laalettes
emaciated wearing market scattered

‘The market is scattered when emaciated woman costumes herself and enters the market’

The second class observation question was "Do students have the desire and motivation to learn about indigenous knowledge?" As to my observation, students in all schools included in the study did not have the desire or motivation to learn about indigenous knowledge. For instance, no one was aware of the conventional meaning and message of a story told in the class.

The third class observation question was "Does the teacher teach communication skills with the help of indigenous knowledge?" In all classes, the teacher, regarding indigenous knowledge, proved that they did not teach the students' communication skills. The observer found one out of six teachers only who was attempting to facilitate students to tell story in class room after brain storming session, while others do not. This indicates that almost all teachers do not teach students communication skills with the help of indigenous knowledge. I tried to find out the reason by directly asking them after class and four of them told me that they have different educational back grounds. This refers to the challenge of teaching and implementing indigenous knowledge transfer methods combined with other skills.

The last aspect of class observation was "Are there any transit pathways for students to come home and reflect in class?" All of them brought nothing from home and did not develop anything in the classroom. Occasionally, there are students who focus only on the meaning of words. This shows that the students are not learning indigenous knowledge (stories, parables, riddles, songs,

etc.) that they acquire from their homes and neighborhoods. This is due to the fact that language and culture in general have a profound effect on them.

When the teachers were asked in interview schedule, they responded as follows. Do you think the content of indigenous knowledge in the Wolayta textbook is properly applied in the classroom? They said, it is not properly applied because of different reasons like class size, students' interest to learn, teachers' lack of awareness about its benefit in language acquisition, and the like. This means that those who are teaching the Wolayta curriculum do not know how to apply it. Wolayta possess their own multi-faceted indigenous knowledge which is passed down from generation to generation in practice and verbally. We have taken up agriculture in the field through soil conservation methods, natural fertilizer production and utilization, crop production knowledge, animal husbandry knowledge and skills (identification of livestock for milk and dairy), identification of crops that can and cannot be sown together, identification of plants that are not suitable for farming and soil salinity, etc. can be mentioned.

The findings showed that these and many other indigenous knowledge channels are not included in the Wolayta curriculum and are a few those included in a curriculum not being implemented for their content. We have seen that the Wolayta has taken environmental knowledge and we are working to protect and identify forests and vegetation. In the field of traditional medicine, the use and care of plants and animals, the protection of aquatic organisms, the identification of different types of plants, their characteristics, their usefulness, the availability of which plants are suitable for human and animal health, and the use of herbal and liver remedies are available. He has his own process for resolving conflicts, and the elders gather at Gutara, where the most difficult of all is to be reconciled without bloodshed and debt, and to swear allegiance to the next generation that they have lied to these elders and will be reconciled.

Aspect	Findings from Interviews	Findings from Focus Group Discussions	Findings from class observation
Awareness of the IKS	70% of teachers are aware of IKS but lack practical understanding.	Pre-service teachers expressed interest but noted insufficient training on IKS.	
Perceived benefits	Culturally inclusive pedagogy improves student engagement.	Teachers-in-training believe IKS can enhance creativity in	

Aspect	Findings from Interviews	Findings from Focus Group Discussions	Findings from class observation
		lessons.	
Challenges	Lack of resources and teacher training cited as primary barriers.	Participants felt unprepared to align IKS with existing syllabi.	
Strategies for integration	Suggested community collaboration and IKS-specific teacher workshops.	Participants recommended integrating IKS into teacher education modules.	
Role of policy	Policymakers acknowledged the need but highlighted budget constraints.	Teachers suggested mandatory policy frameworks for IKS integration.	

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the challenges, integrating IKS presents numerous opportunities. It can enhance cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in classrooms, allowing students from diverse backgrounds to connect with their heritage. Moreover, IKS promotes sustainable practices, such as environmental stewardship and community-based problem-solving, which are increasingly relevant in addressing global challenges (Dei, 2000). Interviews with Indigenous leaders emphasized that blending traditional wisdom with modern pedagogy can inspire innovative teaching approaches and foster a deeper respect for cultural diversity.

Indigenous knowledge is powerful social grace of the public communication to pass the wisdom and knowledge of the generation to next generation if incorporated into the literacy materials and implemented in class room. It can share the cherished practices performed by the community and created the community as identifiable among others. This research focused on the implementation of those indigenous knowledge elements in classroom. However, there are a few epigrams included in grade seven students textbook without their contextual description. Besides, no teacher has awareness about those indigenous knowledge related issues in their classroom and even they are struggling to understand the text towards these elements.

The integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into teacher education is pivotal in creating culturally responsive pedagogy. Insights from interviews and case studies reveal that IKS fosters holistic education by addressing cultural, ecological, and ethical dimensions. Educators emphasized that incorporating IKS can enhance students' understanding of sustainable practices, strengthen cultural identity, and promote ethical decision-making.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into teacher education curricula is essential for fostering culturally inclusive and sustainable pedagogical practices. Developing IKS-specific modules within teacher training programs can ensure that educators are well-versed in traditional knowledge and its application in modern classrooms. These modules should cover areas such as Indigenous ecological practices, oral traditions, and ethical frameworks, enabling teachers to create a holistic learning environment. Moreover, balancing traditional knowledge with modern pedagogical methods can help bridge the gap between local cultural contexts and global educational standards, thus enriching the learning experience for students. For instance, using experiential learning techniques grounded in IKS can enhance both practical skills and cultural sensitivity among learners.

Effective teacher training programs are pivotal for the successful integration of IKS. Workshops and training sessions for both pre-service and in-service teachers should focus on providing hands-on experience with Indigenous practices and pedagogical approaches. These training programs can include collaborations with Indigenous communities, allowing teachers to gain authentic insights into traditional knowledge systems. Collaborative learning, where teachers work directly with community elders and knowledge keepers, ensures that IKS is represented accurately and respectfully in the classroom. Additionally, addressing common misconceptions about IKS during training can build teacher confidence and reduce biases, creating a more inclusive educational environment.

Strong policy support is crucial for embedding IKS into teacher education. National education policies should explicitly mandate the inclusion of IKS in curricula and allocate resources to support its implementation. Policymakers must prioritize funding for the development of IKS-based teaching materials, teacher training workshops, and community partnerships. Furthermore,

policies should encourage collaboration between educational institutions and Indigenous communities to ensure that traditional knowledge is preserved and integrated authentically. Institutional support, combined with clear policy frameworks, can create an enabling environment for the effective adoption of IKS in teacher education.

Indigenous communities that are often made invisible, are the ‘owners of an undervalued knowledge and excluded from the knowledge historically accumulated by the society’ so there is a need for construction ‘from the knowledge of the people and with the people’, which allows for a more critical reading that ‘exceeds the borders of letters and constitutes itself in historical and social relations’ (see, Maciel 2011). Community participation is, therefore, fundamental in the implementation of educational policies that are sensitive to the cultural context of indigenous communities. Community involvement makes it possible to pursue more ambitious goals, with the preservation of culture and the empowerment of indigenous peoples as one of the main focuses for the promotion of an intercultural curriculum.

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