

Indigenous African Synchronicity for Revitalizing Adult Education for Positive Social Change

Sincronicità africana indigena per rivitalizzare l'educazione degli adulti e promuovere trasformazioni sociali positive

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Abstract

The need for and the importance of education, especially adult learning and education (ALE) continues to increase across the world especially given the challenges of our world, hyper-technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The purpose of this paper is the critical issue of the humanistic perspective of education. The central question is: “to what extent do the universal rendering and practice of ALE representative of the world?” And “how fitting is this universal frame within the indigenous contexts?”. This paper offers the Indigenous African synchronized and holistic lifelong learning as a viable compliment to revitalize education for positive social change.

Keywords: African; indigenous; adult learning and education; holistic; social change.

Sintesi

La necessità e l'importanza dell'istruzione, in particolare dell'apprendimento e dell'istruzione degli adulti (ALE), continua a crescere in tutto il mondo, soprattutto date le sfide del nostro mondo, dell'ipertecnologia e dell'intelligenza artificiale (AI). Lo scopo di questo articolo è la questione critica della prospettiva umanistica dell'educazione. La domanda centrale è: “in che misura il *rendering* universale e la pratica dell'ALE sono rappresentativi del mondo?” E “quanto si adatta questa cornice universale ai contesti indigeni?”. Questo articolo propone l'apprendimento permanente sincronizzato e olistico degli indigeni africani come un valido complemento per rivitalizzare l'istruzione per un cambiamento sociale positivo.

Parole chiave: africano; indigeno; apprendimento e istruzione degli adulti; olistico; cambiamento sociale.

1. Introduction

The theme of this special issue is topical to the extent that it focuses on and connects Adult and Continuing Education (ACE)¹ to positive social change and personal fulfilment. Both positive social change and personal fulfilment fall within the focus on global citizenship education. The average dictionary presents social change as changes in human relationships and interactions that modify cultures, values, and social institutions. I assume, for the purposes of this issue, that these social changes are positive. Personal fulfilment also has common threads running through its definitions across dictionaries. Central to its meaning is what Freire (2017) describes as “being in the world and with the world” (p. 53). It is a feeling that one has achieved or is achieving one’s life goals and meeting one’s needs – including accomplishments, purpose, autonomy, and self-worth – especially in one’s context. It is a high state of self-awareness akin to Freire’s (2017) *Conscientization*.

As I survey literature in preparation for this paper, I found items in literature that affirm the focus of this paper. In fact, some of the authors I read expressed the ideas better than I possibly could have. Suffice to mention two of such fitting examples. The first of such piece of literature was an article by Lee and Friedrich (2011) where they presented a critique of ideology in UNSOCO’s lifelong learning policy. The article has a two-clause title and the first clause fits as a description of the place of indigenous education in the dialogue on ACE. The first clause of their title is “continuously reaffirmed, subtly accommodated, obviously missing, and fallaciously critiqued...” (Lee & Friedrich, 2011, p. 151). The second fitting item of literature was by Faure et al. (1972) “Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow” also known as the *Faure report*. The Faure report fits into our argument here because it was inspired by the realities of the time that aimed to revitalize lifelong learning to find a universally acceptable meaning of education that sought to create the “complete man” (Faure et al., 1972, p. 182). The reference to the complete man/woman of Faure’s time is possibly what this special issue’s targets through “personal fulfilment” (ivi, p. 158). 52 years after the *Faure report*, the “complete man/woman” (ivi, p. 182) remains an ideal and especially in parts of the world where ACE is still completely presented and practiced by scholars and practitioners with the colors, taste, and accent from outside the local context (Avoseh, 2001).

2. The Power and Benefits of the Linear Lens

The dominant Western thought pattern uses a linear framework that is mostly unidirectional. The linear framework, from my understanding, separates the knower from the known, and separates hardware from software. It separates the *how* from the *why*, and quite often focuses only on the *how* question. It does not need to put human face on data for it to be valid – as in the separation of quantitative and qualitative. It is scientific and it does not gamble- if A implies B, it must be proved. The linear framework is premised on individualism and rights. Humanity has benefited hugely from this scientific way of thought in terms of science and technology.

This linear framework is the basis for education as we know it from history – including ACE/ALE. Jarvis (2001) alludes to the linear as the pivotal force that directs the affairs of the world. He argues that the forces of globalization and the forces of social change spread

¹ I use ACE and ALE synonymously in this paper because of their interconnectedness under lifelong learning.

“out from one major central point and others from minor ones” (Jarvis, 2001, p. 1). That *one major central point* is also the source of revitalization of ideas, theories, and their implementation in ACE/ALE. Jarvis goes as far back as the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, and the Enlightenment to argue that there was only one driving force of change (linear) which came from Europe. He connects impact of this linear direction to the history of ACE/ALE. According to him, “a great deal of the history of adult education is contained within the broad historical period from the Enlightenment, or more precisely the Revolution, to the beginning of the questioning of the Modernity project in the 1970s...” (*ibidem*). These are the forces that shaped globalization and the AI age. It is a fact that adult education has its origin in social movement aimed at transforming society through education that allows all people to have *an opportunity to continue their education*. It is based on this history that we now seek to revitalize ACE/ALE. It is also based on this history that Brookfield and Holst (2011) argued that the “most concrete and specific act of learning can and should be viewed through the lens of globalization” (*ivi*, p. 129). The lens of globalization is the linear framework and lens. Even UNESCO, despite her commitment to ACE/ALE as a vanguard for social justice, diversity, and inclusion, has not been able to escape the firm grip of the linear framework. Lee and Friedrich (2011) in their analysis of UNESCO’s lifelong learning policy found the pervasive grip of the linear frame through ideology. According to the authors, the analysis of UNESCO’s policy reveals, “the ideological underpinnings embedded in UNESCO’s lifelong learning texts and unmasks how current ideologies of lifelong learning advanced by other Northern-based organizations have during the same period been dominated by the neoliberal capitalist perspectives influential in other social domains” (p. 152).

The linear framework is therefore entrenched, pervasive, and ubiquitous. It is sometimes unintentionally “dictatorial” and sometimes akin to security lines at airports – once one falls in line, one cannot veer off less one triggers security alarms. The linear framework is the king’s way. But do all the above make the linear framework bad or ineffective? No. The linear framework happens to be favored by the forces of history and should not be begrudged for arriving first at the scene. UNESCO has consistently called attention (albeit indirectly) to the need to humanize ACE/ALE, make it inclusive, and human centered. UNESCO has been consistent with this call in several reports and publications especially in CONFINTEAs V, VI, and VII. In the 1997 Hamburg Declaration for instance, UNESCO affirmed that “adult learning should reflect the richness of cultural diversity and respect traditional and Indigenous peoples’ knowledge and systems of learning...”. The emphasis on diversity and inclusion continued with the Belém Framework for Action where UNESCO again underlined the importance of inclusive education. Article 9c in the Belém Framework advocated for developing materials and teaching and learning methods which “recognize and value indigenous and local knowledge, methodologies and mother-tongues in adult learning and education programmes” (Unesco, 1997, p. 16).

Furthermore, Unesco (2015) in a publication reaffirming “global common good” (p. 72) argued in favor of alternative knowledge systems and insisted that “alternative knowledge systems need to be recognized and properly accounted for, rather than relegated to an inferior status” (*ivi*, p. 30). In addition, CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action (Unesco, 2022) in the section on action recommendations for transformative ALE was emphatic about inclusivity and diversity insisting that “specific attention should also be given to including indigenous communities in all education and lifelong learning processes” (p. 6). Finally, on the section on promoting inclusion, the Marrakech Framework concludes as follows: “It is also imperative that the objectives of equity and inclusion be particularly mindful of the realities of, and responsibilities toward, Indigenous

peoples. This commitment derives from the reaffirmation of education as a human right, which includes the right to participation as an enabler of empowerment and of active and global citizenship” (ivi, p. 8).

No doubt, the power, pervasive influence, and dominance of the linear lens is acknowledged. Equally acknowledged is the imperative of inclusion, diversity, and participation of all peoples, values, and cultures in ACE/ALE as a force for positive social change and active citizenship. How do we include these many calls in our efforts to revitalize ACE/ALE? What is the other option/s that offer alternative and complimentary roles? One option that this paper offers is the African Indigenous Holistic Synchronicity.

2.1. African Indigenous Holistic Synchronicity

The central argument in this paper is that indigenous ways of knowing are imperative for revitalizing ACE/ALE for empowerment and positive social change. The paper offers the African Indigenous synchronized and holistic epistemology as a good example. The African indigenous epistemology is holistic, and everything is synchronized with everything else. Although Africa and Africans are endowed with huge and intimidating diversity, there are many common threads that connect the wide diversity of Africa and Africans – especially Sub-Saharan Africa. I have described this diversity severally as *tsunami* (Avoseh, 2000; 2001; 2007). I have also clarified my reservation about the idea of labelling indigenous pedagogies, especially the African indigenous framework as *non-western* perspective (Avoseh, 2007; 2011; 2016). The idea of non-western presupposes that the indigenous perspective is affirmed only through a negation of the Western perspective. This sense of identity implies that the indigenous cannot (and possibly should not) have her identity without reference to the Western. I doubt it very much if any of those who use non-western to describe indigenous ways of knowing have any such negative connotations in mind. Indigenous way of knowing is unique in all its formats and had existed prior to contact with the West. It is simply indigenous.

Part of the uniqueness of indigenous epistemology is its holistic and womb-to-tomb nature that draws a line to infinity. In addition, its uniqueness includes the fact that the ancestors (First Peoples) have the copyright of knowledge. This special copyright makes learning free, accessible, ubiquitous, and compulsory. It is humanistic and framed within corporate existence where knowledge and application are intricately connected (Avoseh; 2001; 2011; 2016). The synchronized system puts humanity at the center and all other aspects of the community and life-defining schemes of a community revolve like a wheel and make the center (humanity) better. The emphasis on corporate existence requires that everyone demonstrates the quality of their education through active participation in the affairs of the community. It is the quality of participation that determines and affirms an active citizen (Avoseh 2001; 2011; 2022b). It is through active citizenship that an individual demonstrates the quality of their character – which was the absolute objective of education as well as the measure of the quality of education (Avoseh, 2001; 2021; 2022; 2024).

The indigenous synchronized lifelong learning runs on orality. Orality is indigenous education’s literary equivalent. Orality emphasizes the power and importance of the spoken word – including observation, imitation, and participation. Orality is the central wheel of dialogue in African holistic lifelong learning. Dialogue in all indigenous epistemology is, to use Freire’s words, “an existential necessity” (Freire, 2017, p. 88). The dialogue is horizontal and it establishes a connection between the physical and spiritual arms of the community. The totality of the *world* (environment) is its recipe. Indigenous Lakota uses the phrase *Mitakuye Oyasin* – literally, *all my people* to express this dialogue that connects

the totality of the environment in a holistic view of the world.

It is in this respect of the indispensable role of dialogue that Freire (2017) calls dialogue a process of naming the world “an act of creation...conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind” (p. 89). Critical thinking is ensured using complex patterns of words. Avoseh (2012) gave the example of how proverbs are used as part of the “intellectual frameworks of indigenous education” (p. 247). Higher order uses of orality through proverbs puts pressure on “the student” to think critically. Again, this tallies with one of the conditions for liberating dialogue in Freire’s pedagogy. He insists that “true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking” (Freire, 2017, p. 92).

Finally, dialogue ensures horizontal flow of communication within the community and makes life a learning process from womb-to-tomb. It is in this sense that everything in a community is education and education is everything in the community. The *life* in lifelong learning is sustained through the blending of the spiritual, physical, past, present, and future into a symmetric relation. This relationship is sustained through a variety of horizontal dialogue across spaces and contexts within a community.

Adult education is always a way of life in this setting where age-group learning provides *grade levels* as there are elementary (primary) to graduate levels in western education. The difference in the grade levels is that whereas grades are distinct in western education, there is a seamless connection between age-groups in that the community serves as one big learning environment (classroom) but with content differentiation determined by age. Because the community serves as one big classroom, there are general knowledge content that put everyone in the same “grade” (class) at some point. Again, the learning that uses the entire community as classroom emphasizes dialogue and communication which has its parallel in Freire’s insistence that “without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (Freire, 2017, pp. 92-93). The gist of the indigenous synchronized lifelong learning is that it has in-built process of revitalization because of its complex nature of connecting everything to everything else such that all and every part of the community is a process of learning and application.

2.2. Spanning The Linear/Holistic Bridge

I have argued in several other forum that the western/linear and the indigenous/holistic lifelong education are not mutually exclusive. The central difference is the holistic and linear divides. The western is linear and focused on individualism while the indigenous is holistic and runs on corporate existence. The western employs science that is distinct and requires proof – including laboratory proof. The linear framework does not gamble especially when using quantitative data. On the contrary, indigenous frames use wholeness and harmony that embrace the difference and weakness of others. It blends the why and how questions in a way that connects to Freire & Macedo’s (1987) rendering of literacy as “reading the word and the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. viii). Despite these differences, there is a sense in which the two frameworks are connected through the Common Good of humanity. Most of the issues highlighted by the Marrakech Framework for instance, connect the linear and the circular worlds. Some of the central focus of the Framework include global citizenship, inclusive and quality education, climate change, sustainability, and the acquisition of skills and education for decent work – the future of work. These areas of focus by the Marrakech Framework relate to the objectives of indigenous lifelong learning. It is worth summarizing the objectives of indigenous

education here. The main objectives of indigenous lifelong learning are to:

develop character;

- inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority all the way to the ancestors;
- develop intellectual skills;
- acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labor;
- understand, appreciate, and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large (Fafunwa, 1974).

These main objectives of indigenous African lifelong learning listed above are in congruence with most of the efforts by Unesco and experts to make ALE, and education generally, useful for humanity. Developing intellectual skills and character are central to active citizenship through involvement and active participation in the affairs of the community. These two objectives also connect to diversity and inclusion, important requirements for global citizenship. The requirement of acquiring specific vocational training and developing a healthy attitude towards honest labor connect to the focus on the future of work as well as to several of the SDGs. The brief comparison above help answer the central question of the extent to which the universal rendering of ALE is representative of the world. It also answers the question on the extent of its fit within indigenous contexts.

3. Conclusion

My argument in this paper is premised on the fact that we can invoke the unusual (possibly the past) to revitalize the present for a better future. Lee and Friedrich (2011) call it “looking backward for looking forward” (p. 165). It is a reasonable and feasible way to foster cooperation and open new perspectives for revitalizing ALE and ACE. Our thesis in this paper implies that any viable revitalization must build bridges across the linear/holistic, outsider/insider and build bridges across ideology and culture without disrupting the cultural and intellectual ecologies of the peoples. Any revitalization of education - ACE/ALE- for positive social change that intends to sustain the global common good must consider the benefits of indigenous lifelong learning as a viable complement. I offer the African indigenous synchronized lifelong learning as one option.

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