Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Transition Correlates Higher Education Curricula: A Case Study from Busitema University

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Abstract

This study looks at the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in Higher Education curricula with a case study of Busitema University in Uganda and it objectively focused on investigating the current practices and existing curricula IK incorporation challenges. The study employed qualitative case study approach, conducting semi-structured interviews while interacting with teaching faculty, students, and university administrators and results were interpreted and analyzed thematically. The findings indicated that IK integration is limited but starting to grow. This growth is hindered by slow changes at the institution, a lack of faculty knowledge, and no clear policies. The study suggests that effectively incorporating IK requires inclusive curriculum frameworks, training for academic staff, and working together with indigenous communities. Recommendations focus on creating policies, developing faculty programs, and forming partnerships to improve culturally relevant education. This study adds to the ongoing discussion about decolonizing curricula and endorsing indigenous ways of knowing in Uganda and similar educational settings.

Keywords: indigenous knowledge, curriculum integration, higher education, decolonization, Busitema University

1. Background of the Study

Universities serve as producers of knowledge and as cultural gatekeepers that influence how authority and identities are formed (Smith, 2021). Decolonizing higher education curricula means restructuring ways of knowing. This involves validating Indigenous Knowledge systems, questioning colonial legacies in scholarship, and altering teaching methods to support indigenous identities and communities (Battiste, 2013; Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025). Indigenous Knowledge (IK) includes the practical wisdom, cultural traditions, and ecological understanding developed by indigenous communities through centuries of interaction with their environments (Ecology, S., 1999; David, M. T. et al., 2025). Despite its inherent value, formal education systems worldwide, largely influenced by colonial and Western ideas, have often overlooked these knowledge systems (Ezra, W., & Charles, M. 2023). This has led to Western knowledge being prioritized, which contributes to cultural disenfranchisement (Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2021). This hierarchy creates injustice, silencing indigenous perspectives in educational programs and deepening cultural separation.

Global efforts to address this issue include international legal frameworks like the United Nations Declaration on

the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Champagne, D., 2013), which supports indigenous people's rights to protect, control, and develop their cultural knowledge and education systems. Additionally, UNESCO and other international organizations promote the integration of Indigenous Knowledge into formal education to encourage diversity, cultural sustainability, and relevance in learning (Agrawal, 2002; Simpson, 2017). Across Africa, universities are facing growing pressure to decolonize their curricula by including Indigenous Knowledge. This shift is deemed essential for promoting sustainable development and affirming cultural identities (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025; Seleke, 2025).

In Uganda, policies like the National Culture Policy (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2016) and the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) curriculum development guidelines (NCHE, 2022) align with global calls for knowledge diversity. However, putting Indigenous Knowledge into practice remains limited due to challenges with institutions, teaching methods, and available resources. This rotates around all universities in Uganda such as Makerere University, Muteesa I Royal University, among others and for this study, focus is on Busitema University. Busitema University, located in Eastern Uganda, is a key public institution for a mainly indigenous student population with strong cultural ties to agriculture, herbal medicine, and environmental care. The university is recognized both regionally and nationally for its work in researching and promoting Indigenous Knowledge, especially through its Natural Products Research and Innovation Centre (NaPRiC). NaPRiC functions as an important link between indigenous herbal practices and modern scientific research, fostering holistic healthcare and innovation that reflects local needs (Busitema University, 2025).

Despite these significant research and innovation initiatives, the thorough integration of Indigenous Knowledge into the curriculum at Busitema University is still in its early stages. The university's strategic plan highlights the need for education that is contextualized and innovative but points out challenges in implementing this integration, such as a lack of clear policies, insufficient faculty training in Indigenous teaching methods, and institutional structures that do not fully support inclusive knowledge practices (Busitema University Strategic Plan, 2018). This divide between research activities and curriculum development underscores the need for this study, which aims to provide practical insights to help effectively incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into the university's programs and support broader higher education reforms in Uganda.

Indigenous Knowledge (IK): Indigenous Knowledge consists of community-developed and orally transmitted knowledge systems. These knowledge systems govern various areas like ecology, health, agriculture, cultural norms, and social organization (Tumwesigye, W., et al., 2023; Ecology, S., 1999). IK includes adaptive strategies and cultures specific to indigenous peoples and environments. Its holistic and relational way of knowing differs significantly from Western scientific approaches, which often break down knowledge into parts and aim for universal truths. This difference creates challenges when trying to incorporate IK into formal education (Agrawal, 2002). At Busitema University, efforts led by the Natural Products Research and Innovation Centre (NaPRiC) show that the institution recognizes the importance of IK. This recognition is especially prominent in areas like ethno-pharmacology and natural products, where researchers look into indigenous herbal knowledge alongside scientific methods to connect different knowledge systems (Busitema University, 2025; Nabatanzi, A., et al., 2025).

Curriculum integration goes far intentionally including Indigenous Knowledge in academic programs (Thomas, W. & Charles, M., 2022). This can happen through core modules focused on IK, adding IK content to regular subjects, or teaching methods that emphasize experiential and participatory learning related to indigenous cultural practices (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Such integration challenges traditional knowledge hierarchies that prioritize Western ways of knowing and creates inclusive, culturally relevant learning spaces that respect indigenous perspectives (Seleke, 2025). Busitema University's efforts toward contextualized education reflect the early stages of implementing these integrative methods, highlighting the opportunities and challenges of authentically including IK in academic programs (Busitema University Strategic Plan, 2018).

This process is essential for creating fair education systems that recognize various ways of knowing and respect different worldviews. At Busitema University, the goals of decolonization appear in both policy directions and research projects. These include efforts that link indigenous herbal knowledge with modern scientific research, showing that higher education can become a significant space for indigenous ways of knowing (Busitema University, 2025; Nabatanzi, A., et al., 2025).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the current practices, barriers, and enhancement strategies for integrating Indigenous Knowledge into the curricula of Busitema University, to support educational relevance, epistemic justice, and cultural continuity.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1) To explore current practices related to Indigenous Knowledge integration in Busitema University's curricula.

2) To identify challenges impeding effective Indigenous Knowledge integration at the university.

3) To formulate recommendations for sustainable integration of Indigenous Knowledge in university curricula.

1.3 Research Questions

This study intended to respond to the following questions:

1) What are the current practices of Indigenous Knowledge integration within Busitema University's curricula?

2) What barriers hinder the effective integration of Indigenous Knowledge in the university's programs?

3) What strategies can be adopted to improve Indigenous Knowledge incorporation in higher education curricula?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Decolonial Theory with the intention of examining the ongoing dominance of Western knowledge frameworks and their role in marginalizing indigenous knowledge within academic institutions (Battiste, 2013). It questions the claims that Western knowledge is universal and argues for a system where diverse knowledge systems exist with equal validity (de Sousa Santos, B., 2015; Tarisayi, 2024). In the context of higher education curriculum reform, Decolonial Theory highlights the importance of epistemic justice. It seeks to break down cognitive imperialism and restore indigenous knowledge as independent and essential rather than peripheral (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025). Recent studies stress that ethical inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) requires moving beyond superficial inclusion. It calls for placing IK at the center of knowledge creation and teaching practices (Tarisayi, 2024; Madziva & Wadesango, 2021). The theory plays a crucial role in this study in way that it frames the inclusion of IK at Busitema University as a transformative effort to challenge historical colonial assumptions in curricula. This shift promotes knowledge diversity and social justice. The theory guides the analysis of Busitema University's curriculum reform strategies. It explores how entrenched Western knowledge can be reshaped to inclusively represent indigenous knowledge in line with decolonial goals (Nandagire, P., et al., 2023).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Indigenous Knowledge in Education

Several studies show that Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is still underrepresented in global, especially African, higher education curricula. This is despite IK's important role in promoting cultural sustainability, solving community problems, conserving biodiversity, and engaging learners (Banda, F. & Banda, D., 2016; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Kaya & Seleti, 2013). Incorporating IK is seen as essential for making higher education institutions more relevant to their contexts and responsive to development (Kaya & Seleti, 2013). In South Africa, programs at institutions like North-West University show that integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into research, teaching, and community engagement improves the educational experience and connects academic and community gaps. However, this integration faces obstacles like Western epistemological dominance, limited faculty knowledge, and unclear institutional support (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025; Seleke, 2025). Case studies from Southeast Asia show notable success where ethnobotanical and indigenous ecological knowledge are included in science curricula. This results in greater collaboration across disciplines and stronger community empowerment (Tanjung et al., 2025). In Uganda, while some universities and public policies support initiatives, most curriculum changes to include IK are still limited; comprehensive institutional frameworks are still lacking (Magara, 2024; NCHE, 2022; Mugabirwe & Turyamureeba, 2025).

2.2 Curriculum Integration Models

Integrating IK in higher education usually follows three main models: embedding IK content into existing courses, creating dedicated IK modules or program specializations, and engaging with indigenous experts and cultural practitioners as co-educators or mentors (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Seleke, 2025; Kaya & Seleti, 2013). Effective integration requires ongoing collaboration among academics, indigenous communities, and policymakers. This ensures cultural respect, epistemic accuracy, and relevance to the context (Druker-Ibanez, S. & Caceres-Jensen, L. 2022). Transdisciplinary approaches, which involve crossing academic boundaries and treating indigenous stakeholders as equal partners, are considered best practice. This is particularly true in technology education, environmental science, and public health (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Seleke, 2025; Mugabirwe & Turyamureeba, 2025).

2.3 Challenges and Opportunities

The literature points out several ongoing challenges to integrating IK. The most prominent issues include the continued dominance of Western knowledge systems, faculty unpreparedness, lack of relevant teaching training, unclear institutional policies, limited resources, and ethical concerns related to cultural appropriation (Ryan, J. & Ivelja, J. 2023; Seleke, 2025; Madziva & Wadesango, 2021). As Kaya and Seleti (2013) note, without strong institutional commitment and adequate resources, IK initiatives often become unsustainable or merely symbolic. Still, policy changes like those from Uganda's National Council for Higher Education (NCHE, 2022) and new digital knowledge-sharing platforms are creating new opportunities for inclusive curriculum reform, increased indigenous participation, and different forms of learning engagement (Magara et al., 2024; Mugabirwe & Turyamureeba, 2025). This blending of policy, technology, and indigenous advocacy indicates a significant movement toward more inclusive, ethical, and context-sensitive curriculum changes in African and global higher education.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the integration of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) into the curricula of Busitema University. A case study is an ideal design for exploring complex, context-dependent phenomena where boundaries between the phenomenon and its environment are not clearly defined (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This method allows researchers to holistically examine real-life experiences and processes within institutional settings. Given the multifaceted nature of IK spanning cultural traditions, local epistemologies, and pedagogical frameworks a case study design is particularly useful in capturing diverse stakeholder experiences, policies, and implementation challenges. This approach is consistent with research traditions in Indigenous Knowledge studies that prioritize community engagement, cultural sensitivity, and contextual understanding (Kaya & Seleti, 2013; Adyanga, F. A. & Romm, N. R. A., 2016).

3.2 Target Population

The target population consisted of **fifteen (15)** participants directly involved in or impacted by the integration of Indigenous Knowledge into the academic processes at Busitema University. The participants were strategically drawn from three key stakeholder groups:

- **Faculty Members (6):** These participants are responsible for curriculum development, course content delivery, and academic mentorship. Their involvement was essential in understanding how IK is conceptualized, interpreted, and integrated into the formal curriculum.

- **Students (6):** All student participants came from indigenous backgrounds. Their lived experiences and reflections on how IK is represented or absent within their academic journey provided critical insights into the effectiveness and relevance of integration efforts.

- **Administrators (3):** These participants included individuals in leadership or policymaking roles, such as deans, directors, or officers responsible for academic affairs and curriculum policy. They offered strategic-level perspectives on institutional commitments, policy frameworks, and administrative challenges.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method often used in qualitative research to intentionally select individuals who have firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. This method is particularly appropriate for exploratory studies where the goal is to gain depth rather than breadth (Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N., 2016).

Table 1. Response rate

Respondent Category	Number of Participants	Sampling Technique
Faculty Members	6	Purposive Sampling
Students	6	Purposive Sampling
Administrators	3	Purposive Sampling
Total	**15**	

The Table 1 above categorizes the composition of the study's participants and their associated sampling method. The use of purposive sampling was grounded in the need to engage individuals with direct, experiential, and policy-related knowledge of IK integration processes. This method ensured that each selected participant had specific relevance to the study's core questions, rather than relying on random or representative sampling which may include individuals without adequate exposure to the subject. The faculty members brought a pedagogical

and design-oriented perspective. Their responses were crucial for understanding how IK themes are either integrated or overlooked in teaching materials, course syllabi, and instructional approaches. Through their narratives, the study uncovered both practical strategies and constraints within curriculum design that affect IK integration. The students, drawn from indigenous communities, provided grounded, firsthand accounts of their encounters with IK in academic settings. Their perspectives allowed the researcher to assess whether IK themes were present, meaningful, and empowering in their educational experiences. Their reflections also surfaced issues related to cultural validation, epistemic inclusivity, and curriculum relevance. The administrators provided the macro-level, institutional view. Their strategic role in decision-making processes meant they were key informants on how IK policies are framed, interpreted, and executed within the university's broader academic mission. This group also shed light on financial, structural, and policy constraints that shape or limit the university's ability to mainstream IK. This triangulated sample structure comprising curriculum designers, direct beneficiaries, and policy influencers ensured rich, layered data capable of revealing both horizontal (across stakeholders) and vertical (within institutional hierarchies) insights. This robust triangulation strengthened the study's credibility and allowed for a more nuanced analysis of the systemic and experiential dynamics involved in IK integration.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Three qualitative instruments were used to gather data:

1) **Semi-Structured Interviews:** These were conducted with faculty and administrators. The flexible interview guide allowed participants to explore themes freely while ensuring consistency across interviews. This approach provided detailed narratives about curriculum practices, challenges, and policy interpretations concerning IK.

2) **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** These were held with the six indigenous-background students. FGDs provided a safe, dialogical space for participants to collectively share their experiences. The group setting also allowed for the emergence of common themes, shared cultural interpretations, and validation of individual narratives.

3) **Document Analysis:** Institutional documents such as strategic plans, course outlines, curriculum frameworks, and policy manuals were examined. This analysis enabled the researcher to assess how IK is formally conceptualized in university policy and where gaps exist between policy intention and practical implementation.

By employing multiple instruments, the study achieved methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and dependability of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, which involves six sequential phases:

1) **Familiarization:** Reading and re-reading of transcripts and documents to immerse in the data.

2) **Coding:** Identifying and labeling meaningful data features relevant to the research questions.

3) **Theme Development:** Clustering codes into coherent categories representing significant patterns.

4) **Theme Review:** Ensuring that themes are internally consistent and externally distinct.

5) **Theme Definition:** Assigning clear, concise labels to each theme and describing their essence.

6) **Narrative Synthesis:** Constructing a thematic report linking each theme to the study's objectives and theoretical framework.

This analytical process was iterative and reflexive, allowing themes to evolve through continued engagement with the data. The final themes reflected the core dimensions of IK integration as expressed by participants across all categories.

3.5 Presentation Style

Findings were presented thematically in narrative form, with each theme aligned to the study's research objectives. Verbatim quotes from participants were used to provide authenticity and richness to the analysis, while also respecting cultural nuances and the contextual grounding of each narrative. Institutional documents were used to validate or contrast participant claims, offering a layered presentation of findings that reflects both policy and lived realities.

4. Presentation of Findings

4.1 Indigenous Knowledge Integration Practices at Busitema University

The study found that Busitema University has made initial and modest strides toward integrating Indigenous Knowledge (IK) within its academic offerings, particularly in specific courses such as herbal medicine and environmental studies. These efforts, however, remain largely uncoordinated and are predominantly driven by the individual enthusiasm of select faculty members rather than being rooted in formal, institutionalized curricular frameworks. This results in IK integration being more incidental and localized rather than a systematic feature across the university's curricula.

One faculty member described this experience, noting:

"Our courses on natural products and pharmacology touch on indigenous medicinal plants, but beyond that, IK is not formally embedded in the curriculum. There is enthusiasm among some staff, but a lack of structured policy or dedicated modules. Integration feels more incidental than strategic — we sometimes include sections on traditional knowledge during lectures, but without formal recognition in the syllabus, it remains peripheral."

This perspective underlines the ad hoc nature of current IK inclusion, where indigenous knowledge is often presented as supplementary material rather than a formally recognized body of knowledge within the curriculum. The presence of IK depends heavily on individual lecturers' interest and expertise, leading to inconsistent student experiences.

Similarly, a student participant reflected:

"I appreciate when lecturers mention local herbal medicines or farming methods brought from my community. It makes learning relatable. But I feel this is not consistent across faculties. Sometimes it feels like IK is just added as an afterthought rather than being legitimized as knowledge equal to Western science."

This comment highlights the perceived marginalization of IK within the academic environment, where it is valued for its local relevance but frequently not afforded equal legitimacy compared to Western scientific knowledge systems. Such findings resonate with previous research emphasizing that sustainable and meaningful integration of IK in higher education requires structured institutional commitment, formalized curricula, and recognition of IK as a valid knowledge system on par with dominant academic traditions (Kaya & Seleti, 2013; Adyanga, F. A. & Romm, N. R. A., 2016; Paquin, 2023).

In the broader literature, successful IK integration models involve explicit curriculum frameworks, dedicated modules or courses, and active collaboration between indigenous communities and academic institutions to ensure respectful and authentic knowledge inclusion (Gabana, J. J., Claur, A. M. & Madrigal, D. V., 2025; UNESCO, 2002). The current practices at Busitema University, while promising, reveal a dependence on individual advocacy and a lack of university-wide strategic policy that limits the reach and legitimacy of IK in curricular offerings.

By and large, Busitema University exhibits a growing awareness and initial incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge in select academic disciplines. Nevertheless, the absence of formal policies and structured curriculum design places IK at risk of being perceived as peripheral rather than integral to education. Institutionalized frameworks, strategic policymaking, and comprehensive curricular inclusion stand out as crucial next steps to legitimize and sustain Indigenous Knowledge integration, ensuring that it is recognized as an essential knowledge system contributing to the university's educational mission.

4.2 Challenges Hindering Indigenous Knowledge Integration

The integration of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) at Busitema University is constrained by several significant challenges that are well-documented in academic literature and institutional reports. Key barriers include the slow pace of institutional reforms, lack of faculty preparedness to effectively teach IK, absence of formal policies or curriculum mandates, limited engagement with indigenous communities, and inadequate resources to support sustainable IK integration.

Institutional and policy gaps are paramount. An administrator at Busitema University noted the absence of explicit policies mandating Indigenous Knowledge integration, stating:

"One immense challenge has been the absence of explicit university policies mandating Indigenous Knowledge integration. Without clear directives, curriculum committees default to traditional Western academic content. Faculty also require training to handle IK pedagogically, which we have yet to systematically provide."

This reflects a critical structural barrier as the curriculum development process remains largely skewed towards Western academic paradigms in the absence of strategic university-wide IK policies.

Faculty competence presents another major hurdle. Effective IK teaching requires an understanding of indigenous epistemologies, including oral traditions, experiential learning, and intergenerational knowledge transfer mechanisms. A faculty member explained:

"Many lecturers are unfamiliar with pedagogy appropriate for IK how to teach oral traditions, practical skills,

and community-centered knowledge. This complicates integration efforts, as standard academic formats don't always fit indigenous epistemologies."

This confirms findings in broader scholarship highlighting that conventional Western academic teaching methods are often incompatible with IK's nature and delivery styles (UNESCO, 2002; Gabana, J. J., Claur, A. M. & Madrigal, D. V. 2025). Faculty capacity-building tailored to these distinct teaching methods remains largely undeveloped at Busitema University.

Another critical challenge is limited collaboration with indigenous knowledge holders and communities. Authentic IK integration necessitates partnerships that respect indigenous custodianship and facilitate co-creation of curricula and research agendas. Although Busitema University actively engages with traditional herbal practitioners and has hosted significant events such as the Herbal Medicine Exhibition for Eastern Uganda (June 2025) to bridge traditional knowledge holders with scientific researchers, these initiatives are recent and have yet to be institutionalized for sustained impact (Busitema University News, 2025). Expanding such engagements is essential to ensure IK is incorporated with cultural sensitivity and legitimacy.

Resource constraints further exacerbate integration difficulties. Dedicated funding, infrastructural support, and development of culturally relevant teaching materials are needed to institutionalize IK. Programs like the Natural Products Research and Innovation Centre (NaPRiC) at Busitema University emphasize scientific validation of herbal medicines, supporting IK through research grants and partnerships. However, broader resource allocation across faculties remains limited (NaPRiC Concept Note, 2024). This reflects a common challenge in African universities where budgetary and infrastructural support for IK initiatives lags behind ambitions (Kaya & Seleti, 2013; Adyanga, F. A. & Romm, N. R. A., 2016).

These challenges mirror those established in peer-reviewed studies on IK integration in higher education across Africa, which stress that without formal policy frameworks, faculty development, community partnerships, and sufficient resources, integration remains fragmented and unsustainable (Paquin, 2023; Gabana, J. J., Claur, A. M. & Madrigal, D. V. 2025).

In conclusion, the main challenges at Busitema University hindering Indigenous Knowledge integration are closely aligned with global and regional scholarly insights: absence of formal institutional policies, lack of pedagogical competence in IK-specific teaching methods, limited indigenous community collaboration, and insufficient dedicated resources. Addressing these requires strategic institutional reforms including policy enactment, targeted faculty training, strengthened community engagement, and allocation of resources to move from isolated faculty initiatives toward systematic and sustained inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in the university's academic landscape.

4.3 Strategies to Enhance Indigenous Knowledge Integration

Respondents at Busitema University recommend several strategic approaches to improve the integration of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) within the university's curricula and teaching processes. Central to these recommendations are the development and enforcement of formal institutional policies that mandate IK inclusion across all academic programs. Faculty capacity building through targeted, ongoing training workshops tailored to IK pedagogy is highlighted as vital to equip lecturers with skills to effectively teach indigenous epistemologies.

A faculty member succinctly captured this necessity:

"Institutional policies must compel us to integrate IK. We need workshops and resources to build our capacity on IK pedagogy. Moreover, involving community knowledge holders as co-educators can enrich curricula and foster respect for indigenous epistemologies."

This speaks to the dual requirement of top-down policy frameworks and bottom-up faculty empowerment to ensure IK is systematically and authentically embedded in teaching.

In addition, respondents emphasize establishing genuine partnerships with indigenous knowledge holders and elders to involve them as co-educators and contributors within the learning environment. This reciprocal engagement helps preserve the authenticity of IK representation and enhances students' cultural pride and cognitive connection to their heritage.

A student's perspective reinforces this point:

"Involving elders and local experts in teaching sessions would make IK more authentic and alive. This partnership approach would also build student pride and confidence in their cultural heritage."

These recommendations closely align with peer-reviewed literature and reports from other African higher education contexts. For instance, Magara, E. (2015) and Kaya & Seleti (2013) argue that effective IK integration necessitates institutional policies, community collaboration, and faculty training in culturally appropriate

pedagogies. The Association of Indian Universities' recent Faculty Development Program on integrating IK into curricula similarly underscores policy support, faculty development, and community partnerships as critical pillars (Pani, A., House, A. I. U. & Marg, C. I. G., 2024).

Further, Gabana, J. J., Claur, A. M. & Madrigal, D. V. (2025) emphasize interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral learning approaches, encouraging the creation of dedicated modules or flexible curriculum spaces to accommodate IK content. UNESCO (2002) identifies the documentation and co-development of teaching resources with indigenous communities as a crucial strategy to sustain IK pedagogy.

By embracing a strategy that combines formal policy frameworks, continuous faculty capacity-building, respectful community collaboration, and interdisciplinary curriculum design, Busitema University can enhance the authenticity, comprehensiveness, and sustainability of Indigenous Knowledge integration, ultimately contributing to decolonizing education and improving its cultural relevance.

5. Discussion

The gradual inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in Busitema University's curricula reflects broader trends observed in African higher education, where policy recognition of IK often precedes substantive curricular integration. Makokotlela and Gumbo (2025) observe that many African universities are still in early stages of embedding IK formally, resulting in fragmented and largely individual-driven efforts. Busitema University's experience of sporadic IK inclusion, primarily led by enthusiastic faculty without a cohesive institutional framework, exemplifies this pattern. This underscores the critical need for explicit institutional policies and mandates to move from sporadic gestures toward systematic, consistent integration of IK across programs.

Barriers to IK integration identified at Busitema University confirm key themes in scholarly research on epistemic marginalization, inadequate faculty preparedness, and policy gaps (Seleke, 2025). These systemic issues hinder the authentic inclusion of IK and perpetuate the dominance of Western knowledge traditions. As Ryan, J. & Ivelja, J. (2023) highlights, the epistemic marginalization of IK is often institutionalized through curricular structures that favor Western scientific paradigms. Faculty members' unfamiliarity with pedagogies suited to IK further exacerbates the challenge, reflecting wider calls for culturally responsive teaching methods (Seleke, 2025). The absence of formal policies and systemic supports reinforces the marginal position of IK, necessitating university-wide structural responses rather than relying on isolated, individual innovation.

The strategies proposed by respondents to enhance IK integration formal policy development, faculty capacity building, community engagement, and promotion of interdisciplinary learning are consistent with international best practices documented in peer-reviewed literature. Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) emphasize collaborative curriculum reform and inclusion of indigenous knowledge holders as co-educators to ensure meaningful integration. Similarly, Jilcha et al. (2022) advocate for faculty professional development and authentic community partnerships as keys to sustaining IK in academia. This multi-stakeholder approach, combining policy, pedagogy, and partnership, provides a viable pathway for Busitema University and comparable institutions aiming to decolonize curricula and legitimize IK alongside dominant academic traditions. These discussions collectively reveal that while Busitema University is beginning to embrace IK, achieving transformative integration will require aligning policy frameworks, faculty development, and community collaboration, reflecting a growing consensus in African and global scholarship on Indigenous Knowledge education.

6. Conclusion

Busitema University's effort to integrate Indigenous Knowledge (IK) into its academic environment marks an important but currently limited shift toward educational pluralism. The university's initiatives, mainly concentrated in areas like herbal medicine and environmental studies, demonstrate initial recognition of IK's value for contextualized learning and local innovation. However, this integration remains fragmented and is not yet embedded within a university-wide framework. The absence of formal institutional policy leaves IK initiatives dependent on the enthusiasm and competencies of individual faculty, leading to inconsistent student experiences and often relegating IK to supplementary rather than core status.

Faculty often lack specialized training to effectively teach IK, which demands unique pedagogical approaches suited to oral traditions, community-based teaching, and experiential knowledge transmission. Without systematic faculty development, lecturers tend to rely on conventional Western academic formats, which may not fully capture or respect the integrity of indigenous epistemologies (Kaya & Seleti, 2013; Adyanga, F. A. & Romm, N. R. A., 2016). Moreover, weak and sporadic collaboration with indigenous communities limits the authenticity and sustainability of IK integration, as community elders and knowledge holders are central to the transmission and validation of indigenous wisdom.

These challenges reflect broader patterns observed in African higher education, where policy recognition of IK often precedes practical curricular transformation (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025). Restrictions such as policy

absence, limited faculty capacity, and insufficient community partnerships hinder the institutionalization of IK at Busitema University and restrict its potential to transform higher education into a more culturally relevant and epistemically pluralistic system.

7. Recommendations

Universities should Develop and Adopt Formal IK Integration Policies: The university should create comprehensive policies that explicitly mandate and support the inclusion of IK throughout its academic offerings. This would formalize the value of IK within curriculum committees, provide clarity and guidance, and ensure its recognition across all faculties and programs in a way that moves beyond isolated, discipline-specific efforts (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025; Kaya & Seleti, 2013). Likewise, they should establish Continuous Faculty Training on IK Pedagogy: Sustained faculty professional development is needed to equip lecturers with pedagogical tools for teaching IK. Workshops should address how to integrate oral histories, practical skills, and collaborative knowledge production into coursework, aligning teaching methods with the unique characteristics of IK (UNESCO, 2002; Gabana, J. J., Claur, A. M. & Madrigal, D. V., 2025). They should also Institutionalize Partnerships with Indigenous Communities: The University should develop formal channels for partnership with indigenous communities, inviting elders and knowledge holders to participate directly as co-educators and curriculum advisers. This collaboration ensures IK is represented authentically and builds students' cultural pride while respecting indigenous intellectual property (Adyanga, F. A. & Romm, N. R. A., 2016; Gabana, J. J., Claur, A. M. & Madrigal, D. V., 2025). They should Allocate Dedicated Resources: Targeted annual budgeting is needed for IK curriculum development, teaching materials, faculty training, and partnership-building activities. This should include support for research and innovation centers like the Natural Products Research and Innovation Centre (NaPRiC) at Busitema, which already promote the validation and application of traditional medicinal knowledge.

All universities should Create Collaborative Networks: Build inter-university platforms for sharing IK integration models, teaching resources, and research outputs. This would reduce duplication, accelerate innovation, and build best practices tailored to local contexts (Adyanga, F. A. & Romm, N. R. A., 2016). Co-Develop Interdisciplinary IK Resources: Engage faculties of agriculture, public health, education, and natural sciences in joint development of teaching modules and materials that reflect the cross-cutting nature of indigenous knowledge (Paquin, 2023). Advocate for National Curricular Frameworks: Universities should proactively collaborate to lobby regulatory bodies for clear, enforceable standards on IK inclusion in higher education.

National Council for Higher Education (NCHE): Mandate IK Inclusion Standards: Set clear and mandatory requirements for the inclusion of IK in tertiary curricula, pushing universities to move beyond voluntary adoption. Fund Faculty Capacity Initiatives: Provide grants for faculty development, particularly for the design and delivery of IK-focused courses, and incentivize research that explores effective IK integration (Gabana, J. J., Claur, A. M. & Madrigal, D. V., 2025). Monitor and Evaluate Implementation: Regularly review and report on institutional progress in IK integration to ensure accountability and guide continuous improvement.

Education Policymakers: Develop National Guidelines: Establish policy instruments recognizing the legitimacy and importance of IK in higher education, setting benchmarks for curriculum content and delivery (UNESCO, 2002). Support Community-Academic Platforms: Fund and facilitate knowledge exchange events, workshops, and digital platforms that bring together academics, indigenous experts, and students. Incentivize Innovative Research: Encourage pedagogical research that documents best practices and outcomes in IK teaching and learning.

Ugandan Government: Promote IK Protection in Policy: Affirm IK as a core value in national education law and strategy, with explicit language on its preservation and promotion. Fund Research Centers for IK: Allocate national research funds to expand centers like NaPRiC and establish new ones, supporting comprehensive IK documentation and curriculum development. Facilitate Intellectual Property Rights: Create frameworks that protect the rights of indigenous knowledge holders and ensure cultural resources are not exploited without proper recognition or benefit-sharing (Paquin, 2023).

In summary, the meaningful and sustainable integration of Indigenous Knowledge at Busitema University and across Uganda's higher education sector demands aligned action across policy, pedagogy, and partnership. With stronger institutional commitments, capacity-building, and respectful community engagement, Busitema can move from isolated initiatives to making IK a living, respected, and essential component of knowledge production and transmission.

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