

The role of indigenous knowledge in addressing Africa's modern-day challenges

WHAT IS INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE?

You may find yourself unfamiliar with the term 'Indigenous knowledge', which is a term being used more frequently around the world, but is interpreted in different ways. It is generally understood to be local or traditional knowledge that indigenous people have brought down with them from earlier times via the oral tradition.

Indigenous knowledge refers to the understanding, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and indigenous people, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life. It is an integral cultural element and encompasses language, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, as well as ritual and spirituality practices.

This knowledge and these cultural practices are important facets of the world's cultural diversity and provide a foundation for locally appropriate sustainable development. Knowing this, can you think of examples of 'indigenous knowledge'?

For some it might be your grandmother's knowledge of herbs and plants that have healing properties. For others it might be the practice of yoga or ayurvedic medicine, which are both ancient practices, or it might be tried-and-tested farming practices that have been used for many generations.

As the world charges ahead with developments in science, medicine, energy production, agricultural methods, and numerous other areas of development, scientists are increasingly realising the benefits of using knowledge passed down from our ancestors over hundreds of years and applying this knowledge to problems being experienced today.

South Africa has a diverse and rich cultural history and with this comes information that has been passed down over the generations. The study of this information and how it can be applied to modern-day problems is referred to as African Studies that are undertaken by academics with a degree in African Studies.

AFRICAN STUDIES AS A CAREER PATH

Nthangeni Thakhani, a Master's Candidate, is currently using his African Studies education to explore ways of teaching and learning indigenous knowledge in the classroom. His study titled: *A case study of Patrick Ramaano secondary school in Ha-Ramavhoya village, Limpopo Province* focuses on African Studies in Education and Curriculum.

There is a consensus that education plays a critical role in promoting economic growth, social development, and reducing poverty. Therefore, African Studies in Education and Curriculum is a crucial component in understanding how educational policies and practices can contribute to the overall well-being of African societies. Research in this field involves examining educational policies and curricula across different levels of education, such as primary,

secondary, tertiary, and adult education. Studies also explore the role of education in promoting democratic ideals and cultural diversity, and in eradicating harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage.



Thakhani Nthangeni, Masters Candidate in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (African Studies).

An interview was conducted by NRF-SAASTA with Nthangeni to share with us why he chose to pursue a career in African Studies.

What are your duties and responsibilities as a student studying African studies?

As a student studying African Studies, my duties and responsibilities include conducting research on various African topics, analysing and interpreting information, writing papers, and reports, and participating in discussions and debates related to African Studies.

What motivated you to choose African studies as a career path and why choose it?

I didn't choose it, I would say it chose me. I wanted to study law but unfortunately admission to the course was already closed at the faculty of law. I then chose to study IKS with the intention of changing the course in the following year, but I fell in love with it and I am now pursuing my Master's degree in IKS. I developed an interest in African culture, history, and societal issues that motivated me to continue with African Studies. I was inspired to learn more about Africa and contribute to the understanding of the continent and its people. In the end, I want to make a positive impact on African societies by addressing and finding solutions to the challenges we face.

Which high school subjects are required to study for this qualification at a university?

High school subjects such as history, geography, and social sciences are helpful for studying African Studies at a university level.

Which qualifications and courses should you enrol for at a university to pursue this career path?

To pursue a career in African Studies, learners can enrol in a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree programme in African Studies or a closely related field.

Where can one work with an Indigenous Knowledge Systems degree?

Graduates with an African Studies degree can work in a variety of sectors such as international development, education, non-profit organisations, advocacy groups, and research institutions.

What other opportunities does this qualification offer?

An African Studies degree opens opportunities in various fields such as international relations, international development, and advocacy work.

Who would you say has been the most help in your career? How did they help you?

Dr Adv P.E Matshidze (Supervisor), Prof V.O Netshandama (Mentor), Dr Adv S.L Kugara (former lecturer) & Dr N.E Ramavhunga (Co-Supervisor and former lecturer). Lastly, my friends: Mr Maimela Glen, Mr Andani Budeli, and Ndou Unarine, are people who always encourage me as well as explain difficult concepts in relation to African Studies. They have been the greatest help in my career as an African Studies student. Prof Netshandama played a huge role in my career; she offered me an opportunity to work under her mentorship where I was challenged to think critically; she provided guidance, and opened doors for me to gain practical experience through internships and research opportunities.

What skills and personality traits are needed for this course?

To excel in the field of African Studies, one needs strong critical thinking and analytical skills, effective communication, empathy, cultural awareness and sensitivity, and the ability to work independently and in groups.

What kind of education and training background does your job require?

A degree in African Studies typically requires a strong foundation in research methods, writing, critical analysis, and analytical thinking. It may also be beneficial to have language proficiency in an African language or two.



Thakhani Nthangeni as an office assistant under Community engagement presenting a project report.

What are the pros and cons in your field?

Pros of the field include the ability to make a positive impact on African societies, exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives, and the opportunity to advocate for human rights and social justice issues. Cons include the limited number of job opportunities and the need to continuously gain knowledge of Africa's history, politics, and current events.

What has been the greatest challenge you have encountered in your career to date?

The greatest challenge I have faced in my career to date has been finding relevant and meaningful career opportunities in the field.

How is your current work positively contributing to a better South African society?

Through my studies and work in African Studies, I hope to contribute to a better South African society by bringing greater understanding and appreciation of Africa's rich cultures and history.

What is the future of your chosen field of interest, especially in light of the constant changes brought by the 4th Industrial Revolution?

The future of the African Studies industry and career is intertwined with the changes brought by the 4th Industrial Revolution. New technologies may change the ways we research and communicate findings about Africa.

What advice would you give to learners interested in pursuing a career in African Studies?

My advice to learners interested in pursuing African Studies is that they should first appreciate their culture and embrace their history, get close to elderly people because they are the custodians of this great rich knowledge. They must stay informed about current events and issues in Africa, seek out mentorship and guidance from knowledgeable and experienced professors and professionals, and gain practical experience through internships in Africa or local organisations addressing African issues.



science & innovation

Department:
Science and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



University of Venda



National Research Foundation

SAASTA

South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement