

Teaching thinking Skills through Wisdom Pedagogy: A Strategy for Survival and Relevance of African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Today's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are facing challenges like globalization, privatization, technological advancement, ranking, massification, demand for skilled labour, change agents and game changers. These forces that have never been known in the past traditional HEIs functionalities, are changing the trends from teaching and learning but rather to facilitators, inventors and innovators. This is because the world of today is questing for graduates with high order skills of thinking and innovation in order to provide solutions to continued challenges that face humanity. The many challenges that humanity is facing today are mostly attributed to education systems and curricula that many graduates have been exposed to especially in HEIs. Many parts of the world are evolving through different education backgrounds that do not seem to provide solutions to their cultural and natural set up, these curricula and educational systems that were aped do not provide both permanent and immediate solutions to humanity hence causing chaos, distrust, corruption, injustice and looting both national and regional resources for personal aggrandization. For countries that envisage to compete positively on the world map and also attract investors, tourists and specialists, must rethink of teaching thinking skills as a new education strategy through which their citizens must compete and participate fully in the new trends of the world order. In this case, if humanity is to regain peace, trust and social justice, protection of environment, culture and freedom, HEIs should be at the fore front to teach and train in thinking skills amongst its graduates and equip them with necessary skills required in the knowledge economy. If this strategy is not embraced and HEIs continue to send graduates to the community without pre-requisite skills and knowledge that lead to new styles of living and coping with 21st century demands, these institutions will lose trust, meaning and relevance to their societies. As many parts of the world are re-strategizing towards achievement of teaching thinking skills, African HEIs seem to be lagging behind due to lack of experts in this field. The purpose of this paper is to unpack the concept of teaching and learning thinking skills so as to provide solutions to African problems.

Keywords: *Teaching, learning thinking skills, Wisdom pedagogy, survival of HEIs*

Introduction

The knowledge economy today has turned the world into Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) in all spheres of human endeavors. The unprecedented life that crops up every day has left humanity at crossroads while vying for solutions to challenges that keep on recurring in every part of the world. These challenges that have solutions but seem to be ignored for known and unknown reasons range from climate change and degradation, poverty, draught, insurgences, injustice and looting the riches of this world. They are attributed to the ways through which elites were trained and the nature of education that they were exposed to during school times.



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The many challenges that humanity is facing today are caused by people who went to school, attended all levels of education and came out as graduates with an agenda of transforming themselves and their communities. Unfortunately, most graduates from all fields of education today have turned against their community for selfish agendas hence dragging their nations into undesirable situations like corruption, abuse of freedom, injustice, distrust and disrespect for humanity and the surrounding to mention but a few. It is therefore important that stakeholders at national, regional and international levels rethink about better strategies for redefining the meaning of education, its philosophy, its parameters, directions and pedagogies so as to prepare humanity in a holistic manner and predict a better future for the next generation.

The only way through which a better world with better life can be regained is through the use of quality education, because without it nothing fundamental will be transformed. Thus, there is a need to redefine the meaning of education, its philosophy, framework and the modes through which education should be delivered in order to nurture better citizenry for a particular country. For instance, countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Japan and many other Asian countries are re-strategizing and redefining their roles on the world map using education as not only the way to improve their social-economic muscles but they are at the same time finding means through which education should prepare a holistic personality with values, culture and spirituality (Aroff, 2014; Bamkin, 2020; Sudarta, 2022). The strategies that are used to prepare the needed personality and all round individuals are achieved through the use of pedagogies like wisdom, Takkatsu, Sejetra, Social emotional learning skills so that issues related to thinking skills, preservation of culture, and protection of spirituality are addressed (Hull, Jensen, & Murnane, 2021; Jimbai Balang, Mahamod, & Aishah Buang, 2021; Koh, Tan, & Ng, 2012; Wang, C., Zhang, Y., Ding, H., 2023). However, this seem not to be the situation especially in many African countries Uganda inclusive. The purpose of this paper therefore, is to unpack the teaching and learning thinking skills in HEIs.

Similarly, African countries like Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have fallen suit to form a better life for their citizens through the use of education with emphasis on skills and competence acquisition. For instance; the Ugandan government has of recent embarked on revamping its education policies, curriculum and education white papers in order to meet its agenda of vision 2040 in which a middle term income community is reflected. However, this notion cannot be achieved without a clear philosophy of education that empowers graduates with skills and competencies. By the time the government of Uganda developed a policy on teacher education of 2018, the Teacher Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa (TISSA) 2013 had established that the African continent was misrepresented and known for unpleasant situations on the world map. From this study, several challenges that affect the quality of education in Uganda were identified. These include; under-professionalization of the teaching profession, inadequate quality assurance and standards; shortage of science teachers and low entry academic requirements into the teaching profession among others. Accordingly, thus leading to the development of a comprehensive National Teacher Policy to address issues concerning the quality of education. “The aim of the National Teacher Policy (NTP) is to professionalize the teaching profession to levels comparable with other professions like medical, engineering, legal, and accounting among others. This policy provides a comprehensive framework for the development and management of the teaching profession with emphasis on improving teaching and learning in the entire education system.” (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018). However, all these strategies cannot be achieved without a clear cut policy of investment in education, teachers’ professional growth and the pedagogies of delivering education to learners. From the issues raised above, it is clearly shown that Africa is going to a state of quagmire due to the education that does not teach thinking skills to empower graduates with necessary competencies for self-development and community transformation especially at HEIs’ level. If this situation is to change and solve all the African challenges observed above, HEIs’ stakeholders must accept the change and shift from traditional pedagogies of teaching to facilitation of thinking skills among learners. Thus, introducing the concept of

thinking skills in order to help HEIs produce graduates with high order thinking skills that address community challenges.

The concept of thinking skills

Teaching thinking skills in education institutions has become a necessity world over and because of its relevance, countries are picking interest in the concept. The concept of thinking skills is geared towards enhancing learners' intellectual development through logical thinking skills, philosophy, reasoning skills and also reading, writing, mathematics and languages. It is a way through which education can make relevance to both individual and society due to the fact that it enhances someone's academic success and professionalism. As the world is searching for a new world order embedded with think tanks that can show direction towards a better life, there is need for education institutions and their managers at all levels to rethink of course structures integrated with thinking skills of professionalism in order to rescue students from being empty cans to constructing their own knowledge (Rosnani & Alias, 2020).

According to Heard, Scoular, Duckworth, Ramalingam, & Teo, (2020), thinking skills may also imply "to analyze and evaluate information, reasoning and situations, according to appropriate standards, for the purpose of constructing sound and insightful new knowledge, understandings, hypotheses and beliefs. Thinking skills encompasses the students' ability to process and synthesize information in such a way that it enables them to apply it judiciously to tasks for informed decision-making and effective problem-solving". Therefore, Thinking Skills is the process of teaching reasoning and reflecting towards making a sound judgment regarding a given subject matter in terms of believing or doing it. Or it may mean a way through which skillful and responsible judgment is done with sensitivity to context based on certain criteria and self-correcting (Wirawani, & Wirawahida, 2016). It can also imply thinking logically with an agenda of improving someone's philosophical skills and capacity (Butterworth & Thwaites, 2013). For someone to reach this level of intelligence in the knowledge-based era and computerized world, he or she should have a will to unlearn, relearn, and learn, conceptualize, synthesize, contextualize and actualize issues in line with the new developments and dimensions of life.

Meanwhile, the internet and technological advancement have brought about globalization with different dimensions towards human development and civilization. These trends that keep on recurring today have resulted into a great paradigm shift in education in many parts of the world. Consequently, this shift in the focus of learning for the 21st century requires; teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness, product to process and students as empty cans to constructing their own knowledge. Unfortunately, our education especially at higher education institutions has not prepared graduates to be transformative and producers but rather informative and consumers. This can be evidenced through their entry requirements that call for three principle passes and the mode of delivering content not knowing that the world today is shifting into communiversity and humaniversity. The world of today requires universities and other tertiary institutions to move out of laboratories and classes to communities so that whatever knowledge that these institutions come up with, is in line with community needs and challenges. It is therefore important that HEIs' managers liaise with government agencies responsible for curriculum development, implementation and supervision to work together towards redefining the direction of a given country like Uganda. When the two stakeholders at different education levels work jointly, better alternatives of preparing holistic learners will be achieved and the world will be saved from a humanity without skills, competencies, values and evil societies that are cropping up today against human natural set up of life.

Thus, the need to come up with course structures integrated with skills through which knowledge, morals, culture and spirituality are interwoven is urgent so as to seek a better trajectory for the next future generations. In some countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, to a certain extent established the curriculum integrated with skills to address the gap in education especially at higher education levels (Hull et al., 2021).

Additionally, another vital micro dimension which is related to the pedagogy for a meaningful education, for a critical and creative mind, for wisdom and ethical growth has been forgotten especially in curriculum development and implementation at HEIs level without which education cannot make meaning to graduates. This paper also explains why teaching skills in HEIs is important towards revitalization of philosophy and philosophical inquiry in education. This is because it is a necessity that leads to application of Wisdom Pedagogy. When wisdom pedagogy is applied practically in both teaching and learning of thinking skills, a community of graduates imbued with critical, creative, caring, communicative and collaborative skills coupled with wisdom and sound judgement for self and community transformation will be realized.

Therefore, teaching thinking skills through wisdom pedagogy helps to handle both theoretical and practical aspects of a given course structure. In levels of education where thinking skills programmes so far have been employed the nature of graduates and their thinking capacity is completely different to what we see in our country. Consequently, there is a need to borrow a leaf from such countries like Singapore who were at some point below Uganda in terms of development, growth and transformation.

Thus, for a country like Uganda which has of recent developed a policy regarding teacher professionalism, revamped the curriculum at secondary level and the same time redefining the education white paper, there is a need to borrow a leaf from Asian countries like Malaysia on how education has propelled their growth rate, transformation and turned them into education hubs on the world stage. However, all these strategies cannot be achieved without a clear national education philosophy policy to guide on the kind of graduates needed to cause the social economic transformation of a country.

Incorporating teaching thinking skills through wisdom pedagogy at HEIs levels is one of the ways for enhancing professionalism among graduates. However, this cannot be achieved if strategic direction for policy implementation are not developed. For instance; in many Asian countries policies like National Education of Philosophy (NEP) regarding this concept of thinking skills have been developed with emphasis on holistic education, production of intellectually physically, spiritually and emotionally balanced personality (Hebert, 2021; Hung et al., 2021). Thus, philosophy works as a framework for curriculum design and its implementation and practice. If one asks what the philosophy of education for your country is, what do you say especially HEIs?, if there is no clear and concrete answer to the philosophy of education then what are HEIs training? and for what?

Meanwhile, to achieve the said agenda of NEP and intellectual capacity development, the ministry of education Malaysia came up with student centered teaching methods like the inquiry and discovery method, wisdom, Sejetra, the Socratic methods, discussion in general, project and group work. This was intended to infuse thinking skills into the teaching and learning strategies and at the same time realign the country's education goals with the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals that include environmental, socio-cultural and economic transformation cannot be achieved without quality education delivered to learners with necessary pedagogies that address the needs of the time in terms of thinking, spirituality and culture protection.

Since education is no longer about accumulation of knowledge, rather the focus now rests on having a mindset ready to adapt new styles of living that not only promote problem solving strategies but also think of ways through which new knowledge and information can be formed so as to make right practical decisions for both individual and community transformations.

With the introduction of the competence-based curriculum and government's policy towards professionalization of the teaching profession, there is need for HEIs to employ wisdom pedagogy as a technique for enhancing thinking skills among instructors and learners of different levels of education. Through this strategy, students shall be able to apply the acquired knowledge in their lives, make informed decisions after analyzing information and arrive at needed solution to recurring problems in our

societies. This is based on the analogy that the many teaching methods used for the past years have not been facilitating teaching and learning skills. The emphasis for the past years has been on a mastery of content, examination and replication of what was crammed in class.

Moreover, the 21st century demands require students and facilitators to 1) have judgment on the credibility of sources of information; 2) identification of conclusions, based on reasons, and assumptions; 3) quality judgment of an argument, including the acceptability of its reasons, assumptions, and evidence; 4) development and defending one's position on an issue; 5) asking appropriate and clarified questions; 6) planning experiments and judgment of experimental designs; 7) defining terms in a way appropriate for the context; 8) being open-minded; 9) trying to be well-informed; and 10) drawing conclusions when warranted, but with caution (Wirawani, & Wirawahida, 2016). However, all this cannot be attained without employing wisdom pedagogy in teaching thinking skills at HEIs level.

A brief discussion of teaching thinking skills in HEIs through the use of Wisdom pedagogy

Wisdom pedagogy is the concept for enhancement of philosophical inquiry through which a community with skills of inquiry is formed based on critical, creative, caring, collaborative thinking and communication skills at all levels of education (Hashim, Rosnani & Alias, 2020; Yusoff, Hashim, Khalid, Hussien, & Kamalludeen, 2018). To achieve the objective of this pedagogy, the issue of practical skills, projects, questions for problem solving and grouping learners with tasks to address are key during the teaching and learning session. In this case learners are helped to unlearn and learn how to question and provide rightful answers that lead to creation of their own knowledge. This process calls for advanced research on the side of the instructor and later write scenarios that call for reflection in relation to community challenges and needs. Through this practical session, a teacher becomes a facilitator with an aim of empowering learners with skills for self-discovery in terms of competencies and management.

When the instructor adopts this methodology, an experience of unlearning, learning, relearning, synthesizing, conceptualizing, contextualizing and actualizing knowledge for both the instructor and the learners will be enhanced. Thus, empowering the instructor with skills of being a facilitator rather than being a lecturer and dominate the entire session of teaching and learning.

The concept of wisdom pedagogy is derived from P4C theory and practice for improvement of interpersonal relationship skills, which was developed by Matthew Lipman in 1989, 2003 and 1970. (Hedayati & Yahya, 2009). The theory came about after realizing that students' reasoning and articulation of issues in the University of Colombia was low and weak to measure to the standards of the time in terms of making thoughtful and rational judgments.

Through his efforts to address the concern as it appears in many of HEIs today, a pedagogy unique in nature and interwoven with Dewey, Vygotsky ideas was introduced to train students reading skills from novel texts and later questions would be raised for discussion. From that time to date several efforts have been done to adopt this method to address the needs of different regions in terms of culture, religion and background. Thus leading to variant forms of measuring P4C for instance philosophy of children (UK) and Wisdom (Hikmah) pedagogy Malaysia but the commonality in all of them is the aspect concerning the community of inquiry (Karadağ, & Yıldız, 2018; Green, Condy, & Chigona, 2012; Makaiau, 2017).

The P4C pedagogy has proved the best approach in nurturing and improving thinking skills among learners at different levels of education towards empowerment of students to achieve the following

- 1) Strengthening and improving reasoning;
- 2) Developing a mindset with creativity;
- 3) Nurturing, or upbringing self-driven and confident individuals, with open minds coupled with an element of mutual respect, co-operation, and being considerate of others;
- 4) Fostering communication skills and collaboration;

- 5) Finding meaning from what is experienced and learned;
- 6) Making a wise decision based on the principles and thorough examination of all available options.

To address the needs of Malaysian education system, Wisdom pedagogy was developed with another component that reflects on knowledge integration, spirituality, culture and the purpose of nature and life. Since Uganda's culture is not far different from Malaysian and other Asian countries, it is important to infuse this pedagogy into our education system to seek for a better future for the next generation.

As we know that the economy of a country can never be greater than the education of its people, it is important therefore, that our nations prepare a holistic personality saturated with skills, competencies and manners that lead to sound judgment, to understand nature and its relevancy to life. This should be coupled with formation of attitudes, beliefs and actions based on religion and culture so that the environment and natural set up of this world is protected.

Since HEIs are responsible for preparing experts, specialists, technocrats and consultants, it is imperative that these institutions cope up with the needs of the 21st century and accept the paradigm shifts that are in place to change the ways through which teaching and learning is conveyed to our communities.

Conclusions

The concept of teaching thinking skills through the use of wisdom pedagogy is long overdue even though HEIs are still static in the way the delivery of knowledge and skills is done. It is important to understand that it is only through teaching thinking skills that quality education and proper procedures of its transformation will avail solutions to serious recurring challenges in our societies. In addition, a direction of a country is defined through a well-designed curriculum geared towards achievement of a given philosophy of education, therefore when a curriculum is outdated, the results will be outdated, this means that students will not be able to get the required skills and competencies required in the 21st century. Likewise, a given curriculum cannot make sense when different stakeholders at all levels of education are not engaged for their input towards it.

For African countries like Uganda that intend to be self-reliant in the next few decades, envisaged that the only way to survive challenges of the knowledge economy was through provision of quality education. Uganda also revised its policies regarding education so as to cope up with the needs of the time. For example, the competence-based curriculum policy for lower secondary school, the Uganda National Teacher's Policy. These policies call for a paradigm shift in the way we prepare students to thrive in the waves of a globalized world driven by technological advancement, privatization, commodification, internationalization, thinking skills, Englishnization, total quality management among others. These challenges that some institutions have taken as an opportunity to reposition and redefine themselves have left a bigger percentage of the world of HEIs at crossroads hence teaching students of the 21st century with content and methods of the 18th and 19th century without change.

Implications and Recommendations

Teaching thinking skills through wisdom pedagogy is a pre-perquisite for any country and its education systems that intends to score strides at national, regional and international level. However, this direction cannot be achieved if policy guidelines regarding education sector in terms of investment policies towards education are not long enough to cater for the needs of learners, teachers and the community.

The efforts for teaching critical thinking skills through wisdom pedagogy call for combined efforts from stakeholders at all levels of education. They have to understand that a given country like Uganda can only survive the waves of today and at the same time compete favourably in the knowledge economy through quality education designed with proper pedagogies that address the 21st century.

Thus, the survival of HEIs lies in their agility towards incorporation of teaching thinking skills into their course structures. This should be done through the use of wisdom pedagogy without which, the relevance and survival of these institutions towards human growth, and transformation is doomed.

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