



Indigenous knowledge and happiness in higher education: A systematic review

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Recommended Reference: Kimwere, B., Waigwa, J. M., Mugo, E. W., Omoi, K. N., & Ndolo, J. (2025). Indigenous knowledge and happiness in higher education: A systematic review. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 2(4), 660–671.

<https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.2.4.60>

ABSTRACT

From ancient times to the current digital era, the pursuit of happiness has remained the most painstaking human endeavor. This paper presents a systematic review of peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2025 to explore the application of indigenous knowledge within higher education. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework has guided this systematic review. Only 10 studies were selected for this study from various databases, including Scopus, JSTOR, and ERIC. The findings suggest that profound misunderstandings impede the attainment of happiness, particularly from an African perspective. Other studies have indicated that the commercialization and marketization of African universities have led to the replacement of happiness with satisfaction, as these institutions shift towards consumer theory. The review reveals that other societies, particularly in the East, have found happiness in their education systems through the application of indigenous, local knowledge. In conclusion, this paper contends that the African must discard the negative perception of indigenous knowledge and seek new ways of entrenching local traditions and wisdom to improve happiness levels within learning contexts. This paper recommends empirical research to understand how indigenous knowledge can be applied to increase happiness in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Commercialization, Education, Happiness, Indigenous Knowledge, Satisfaction

I. INTRODUCTION

Over 2,000 years ago, Jesus, one of the most outstanding teachers in history, delivered a sermon on divine happiness (Beatitudes). Before him, the Greeks, famously Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, and others, had laboriously attempted to define happiness and how humans can ultimately attain this elusive state of being. Closer home, in Egypt, as Ouf and El-Zafarany (2018) explain, ancient Africans inscribed joy and happiness in hieroglyphs, underlining happiness as an inherent part of daily life and religion. Unlike now, people then pursued happiness in its rawest form by focusing on their indigenous knowledge and understanding of local people, animals, gods, and the environment. Unfortunately, as Wu et al. (2022) have shown, higher education has now been correlated with increasing unhappiness. Besides, post-pandemic, Rahman et al (2024) have revealed that academicians do not have good health and well-being due to a myriad of factors, including psychological distress, burnout, and job insecurity. In a recent study, which focuses on student happiness, Caridade et al. (2025) underline the need for good emotions during learning, concluding that most learners are not happy and there is a need for a change in teaching methods to make these individuals happier.

Having explained that happiness is crucial in education and there is a need to increase its levels, one query is how this lofty goal can be attained, especially in the marketized and commercialized higher education context. Fortunately, in India, Deepa (2025) suggests that indigenous knowledge, including yoga, has been found to improve happiness in teachers. In Indonesia, Daroin and Aprilya (2022) also outline the crucial role that indigenous knowledge is playing in boosting the emotion of learning. In this scenario, one must explore whether the same outcomes have been attained within the African education system. Are African scholars working within their national education curricula to entrench indigenous knowledge as the magic bullet for achieving greater happiness levels for both students and academicians? What benefits can be attained by borrowing local wisdom and knowledge in the pursuit of happiness in



these institutions? Can happiness be achieved in the African higher education system that has been highly marketized and westernized through indigenous knowledge? Indeed, this systematic review delves into this theme.

1.1 Research Objectives

The primary objective was to examine how indigenous knowledge can be applied to improve happiness within higher education, with a major focus on African learning establishments. The review considered research studies conducted in other regions, including from Eastern societies and evaluates the potential of such outcomes being replicated to improve happiness among students and academics in Africa. The minor objectives were to assess how happiness is currently conceptualized and the experiences within higher education, globally and also in Africa. Besides, it was vital to compare the African approaches with societies where indigenous knowledge has been accepted and successful integrated into education. Furthermore, this review sought to highlight gaps in scholarly research on indigenous knowledge and happiness within African higher education. The last objective was to recommend future research directions, especially on the need for empirical and also qualitative studies to entrench indigenous knowledge in national curricula to promote happiness.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Design

Pollock and Berge (2018) have explained that systematic reviews seek to answer pre-defined research questions utilizing both reproducible and explicit methods to identify, critically appraise, and combine varying results from primary research studies. Indeed, this is important as the body of research grows in a specific field, necessitating rigorous syntheses of the available best evidence (Aromataris & Pearson, 2014). Based on this, this systematic review explores studies conducted in Africa and beyond, which focus on the issue of happiness, indigenous knowledge, and higher education. The systematic review was registered with Prospera on November 8 and the issued number was CRD420251207217. The primary objective of this synthesis is to answer this central question: Can indigenous knowledge help higher education institutions, especially in Africa, attain happiness for both students and academicians?

2.2 Data Collection

The data collection process used the systematic research method and entailed identifying the steps necessary to conduct in-depth literature review with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach, which researchers have praised for its effectiveness (Page et al., 2021; Mishra & Mishra, 2023). Technically, PRISMA, according to Dwinggo et al. (2023), is the accepted approach for presenting evidence in systematic reviews and also in meta-analyses. Specifically, this systematic review only considered peer-reviewed journal articles. As a result, conference proceedings, reports, books, and other online materials were not considered. The articles for this review were selected based on three criteria: refereed in academic journals (which was to ensure the highest quality of refereeing), published in the last 10 years (2015-2025), and discussion of indigenous knowledge and happiness. The exclusion for this review included relevance, quality, and language. For example, studies not published in English were not included in this review. The databases that were used in searching for relevant research studies included Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, and PsycINFO. The keywords for the search included 'happiness,' 'indigenous knowledge,' and 'happiness in higher education.' Figure 1 shows the article screening procedure that was adopted for this study.

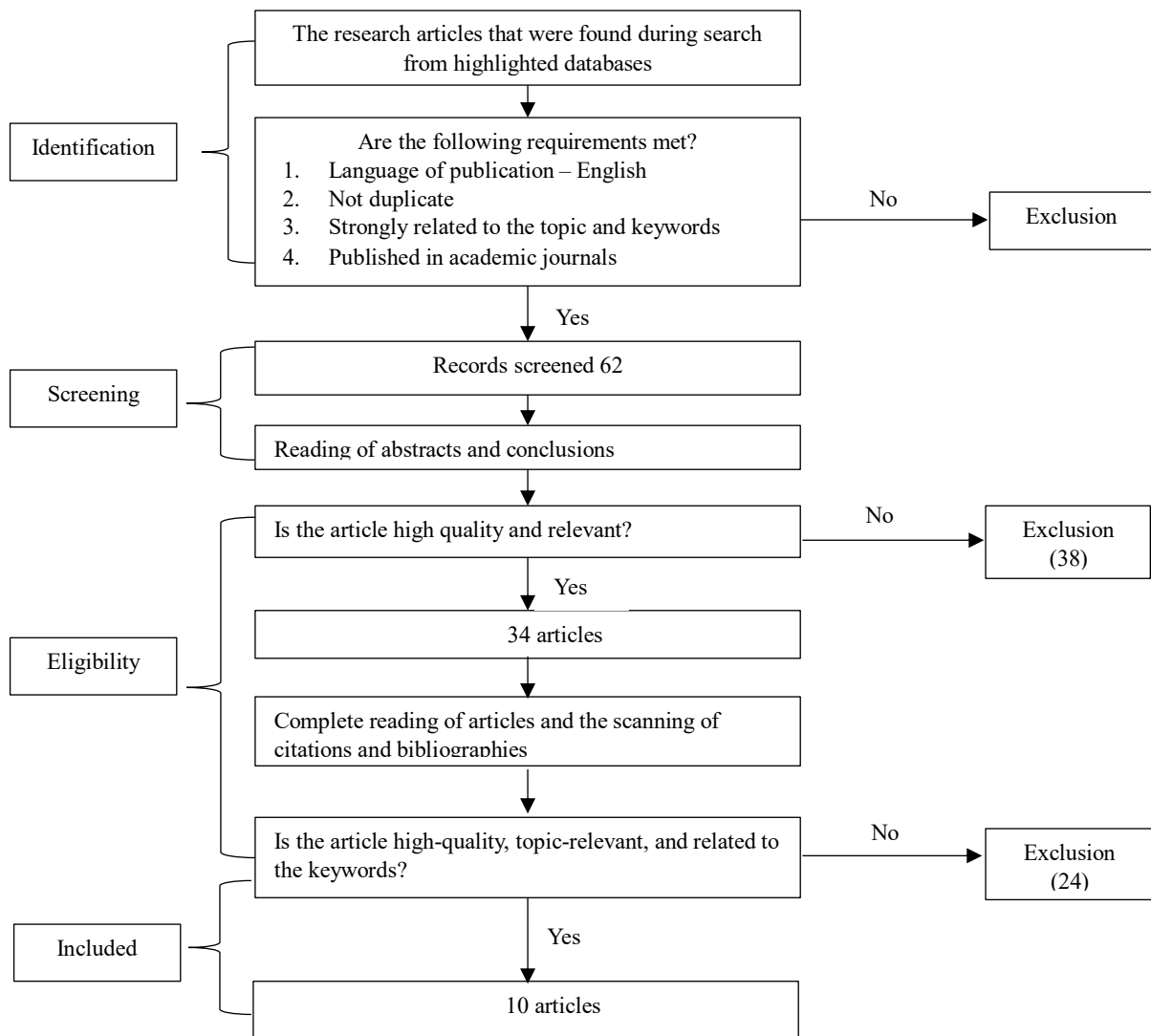


Figure 1
Article Screening Procedure

2.3 Data analysis

Specifically, this review used thematic and descriptive content analysis to address the formulated research questions. The emphasis on descriptive analysis aims to provide readers with an overview or background of the selected research studies by highlighting the outcomes through charts, tabulation, and describing the crucial study’s characteristics. Besides, the focus on thematic content analysis was imperative in conducting data analysis for this research study. The first task was to manually encode the primary issue researchers presented in their papers. Afterward, the study adopted an interpretive methodology to later analyze the key outcomes of the selected studies.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Essentially, the independent variable in this review was the application of indigenous knowledge within higher education. It is on this variable that the review examines the potential influence happiness. Some of the independent variables within this context are traditions, practices, local wisdom, and the culturally grounded pedagogies that are used in teaching and learning. On the other hand, the dependent variable is happiness among academics and studies, given that this is the outcome that changes depending on whether indigenous knowledge is applied successfully. As the following findings show, happiness is reflected through the emotional wellbeing, reduced burnout, positive learning experiences, and the enhanced satisfaction within academic life. The table below highlights the analysis of the 10 studies selected for this systematic review.



Table 1
Summary of Key Findings from the 10 Consulted Publications

Author(s) & Year	Title/Source	Focus/Objective	Methodology	Key Findings	Relevance to My Study	Gaps Identified
Deepa, P. R. (2025)	The impact of Indian knowledge systems on teachers' well-being and the Happiness Index in education	The study explores the effect of India's indigenous knowledge on Happiness index and teacher's well-being.	Systematic review	Indigenous knowledge provides practical tools, such as yoga, which helps nurture physical health, spiritual growth, and emotional balance.	The study offers insights regarding the use of indigenous knowledge and how it can improve happiness in educational contexts.	The study lacks robust analysis of indigenous knowledge and does not have theoretical foundations. The study was also completed in India and might not be applicable to the African system.
Chung, H. F., & Huang, C. J. (2021)	Investigating the relationships between cultural embeddedness, happiness, and knowledge management practices in an inter-organizational virtual team	The study focused on explaining influences of Chinese cultural elements on knowledge management and how they affect employees' happiness.	A qualitative case study	Knowledge-sharing behaviors are an outcome of complicated interplay of a sense of well-being. Employee happiness is a determinant of knowledge-sharing behaviors.	The study evaluates the concept of happiness based on Eastern and Western understanding of knowledge management. <i>Quanxi</i> (Chinese interpersonal relationships) influence corporate creativity and boost employee happiness.	The study is mainly focused on multinational context and does not explain how the concept of <i>Quanxi</i> can be applied to the African context.
Nepal, T. K. (2024)	Aligning gross national happiness, sustainable development goals, and traditional ecological knowledge: A path to holistic well-being	The study examines the connection between Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Gross National Happiness (GNH), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).	Qualitative methodology	The study concludes that empowering local community promotes indigenous solutions to developmental issues and the application of TEK could help incorporate spiritual, material, and environmental elements to guarantee the building of inclusive, resilient, and sustainable futures.	The study acknowledges the need to promote happiness over wealth accumulation and the need to adopt local knowledge to promote happiness.	The methodology section is not robust and this affects the reproduction of a similar study. The study was conducted in Asia and findings might not be generalizable outside Bhutan.



Reyes-García, V., Gallois, S., Pyhälä, A., Díaz-Reviriego, I., Fernández-Llamazares, Á., Galbraith, E., ... & Napitupulu, L. (2021)	Happy just because. A cross-cultural study on subjective wellbeing in three Indigenous societies.	The study sought to understand the subjective drivers of happiness or personal well-being among indigenous communities in the tropics.	Qualitative case study design	Moderate happiness was the normal among members, with most individuals making reports if something exceptionally good or bad happened to them.	Indigenous communities have unique practices that guarantee happiness over time and these cannot be adequately covered by Western knowledge and its conceptualization of knowledge.	The study fails to explain the correlation between indigenous knowledge management and happiness within indigenous communities.
Uotinen, J., Loivaranta, T., & Seal, A. (2025)	Nonhuman Well-Being is a Part of Happiness and Well-Being Conceptions Among Central Indian Indigenous Communities	The authors sought to capture alternative human realities apart from those well reflected in literature and this involved understanding happiness conception from local indigenous communities.	Qualitative case design, interviews, direct observations	People valued a sense of connection, with the well-being of both human and nonhumans being a crucial source of human happiness.	Indigenous views on happiness have been marginalized, requiring a greater understanding of how indigenous knowledge management can boost institutional happiness.	The study was conducted in India and might not be generalized within the African context. The study failed to provide a direct relationship between indigenous knowledge management practices and happiness.
Misra, G., Pandey, N. M., & Mishra, V. (2024)	Indigenous Perspectives on Happiness: Insights from Indian Traditions	The chapter intended to explain the unique understanding of happiness based on indigenous perspectives.	Literature review	Happiness in the traditional sense incorporates optimism, a sense of wellness, lack of illness, and the securing of the well-being of others.	The conceptualization of happiness in the indigenous context is different from Western thought that tends to prioritize material accumulation and personal well-being at the expense of well-being of others.	The chapter explains the conceptualization of happiness from the Indian culture and the lack of a methods section affects the robustness and replication of these findings.
Trinh, L., & Khanh, H. (2019)	Happy people: Who are they? A pilot indigenous study on conceptualization of happiness in Vietnam.	The study focused on local definition of happiness understanding that this requires specific cultural contexts that are developed systematically.	Mixed methods	The outcome demonstrate that local understanding of happiness involve multiple concepts like health, material, self-actualization, community belonging, and social relationships.	The results confirm that local cultures have a unique definition of happiness and provide pathways for which people can attain happiness within communities and organizations.	The study fails to provide a link between happiness and indigenous knowledge. The study was conducted in Vietnam and lacks measures that could help apply the findings in the African setup.



Arora, R. G. (2020)	Happiness among higher education academicians: a demographic analysis.	The author sought to highlight the factors that could increase happiness among academicians and also the relationship between happiness and their performance.	Quantitative study	The study concludes that higher education institutions must set rules and policies that would promote institutional happiness to boost performance within this sector.	The results underline the essence of happiness within institutions and how it can be attained and also affect other core activities.	The author does not explain how indigenous knowledge management practices can be applied to attain greater happiness within educational contexts.
Raymunde, P. P., & Caballo, J. H. S. (2023)	Happiness level and happiness portrayal among tertiary education institutions educators.	The study explored the level of happiness among educators and the relationship between happiness and its portrayal in this sector.	Quantitative Correlational Research Design	The outcomes underlined the need for educational organizations to provide avenues to increase happiness for educators as a way of enriching their personal and professional lives.	The study shows that happiness is integral in promoting better outcomes in educational contexts and other organizations.	The study was conducted in Philippines and require further analysis to be applicable to the African context.
Nanda, M., Patel, J., Nath, S., & Ravindranath, S. (2025)	Happiness in education from the lens of children: Photovoice of students in government run schools in India.	The study sought to explore happiness in the perspective of children within the Indian education system.	Qualitative	The concept of happiness in this sector rises from multiple dimensions, including connectedness to self, others, and society.	The study acknowledges the need for holistic development and educational practices to promote happiness to align with broader global education standards.	The study fails to apply indigenous knowledge as a means of promoting happiness within the education system. The sample size is inadequate to make the findings generalizable to the African setup.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Western versus African Conceptualization of Happiness

The Western conceptualization of happiness goes back to the 3rd century BCE and was explained by ancient Greek philosophers (Lomas & Lomas, 2018). The two primary perspectives on happiness arising during this period were hedonism and eudaimonia (Fave et al., 2010). From the hedonistic point of view, happiness is derived from the unrestrained pursuit of immediate enjoyment and pleasure, with this happening as people maximize pleasure while simultaneously minimizing pain (Prajapati, 2019). Therefore, based on this approach, happiness is an outcome of pleasurable experiences and their related sensory gratification outweighing painful experiences. The hedonistic explanation of happiness makes it conditional, circumstantial, and unstable, with humans having the daunting task of ensuring that their next set of experiences continues to induce greater happiness than the last.

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, perceived the entire circus of pleasure-seeking as vulgar, which led him to popularize the second perspective—*eudaimonia* (Prajapati, 2019; Rosen, 2024). The ideas regarding this kind of happiness are rooted in the belief that people need to possess the greatest goods available. In this context, this could entail people living a worthwhile life, realizing their full potential, and adhering to internal virtues and social values, such as friendship, ethics, and knowledge (Prajapati, 2019). The *daimon*—the true self—promotes people to seek excellence, and this gives people the purpose and direction of life (Rosen, 2024). Based on this *eudaimonic* approach, happiness becomes the objective standard and a state that must be pursued and earned through the right action. Scholars have summarized this to suggest that this perspective paints happiness not as a function of feeling but rather as a function of virtue, with this being supported by Plato's claim that the happiest man is one who does not have a trace of malice in their soul.

Chukwuebuka (2024) affirms that the African conceptualization of happiness differs considerably from Western thought, in that happiness is deeply communal and relational. The author contends that the Western understanding of happiness is focused on material wealth and individual fulfillment. However, an African is truly happy when living harmoniously with the environment and in peaceful coexistence with others. Chukwuebuka (2024) adds that happiness is a product of a balanced relationship with forces that are in the hierarchy of being, which stresses the essence of collective well-being and interconnectedness. The explanation is in sharp contrast with the Western explanation of happiness, which promotes a metaphysical view of material accumulation and pushes personal success. African happiness, according to Chukwuebuka (2024), is not limited to this life but extends beyond death, with the desire to have a state of blessedness in the afterlife. An African must abandon all forms of egocentric attitudes and understand that happiness is a product of natural and collective existence.

In their study, Ratele and Rustin (2023) lament that there have been limited attempts to decolonize the concept of happiness to ensure a logical African-centered psychological approach. Ratele and Rustin (2023) fully agree with Chukwuebuka (2024) on the need for a balanced life if an African desires to attain lasting happiness. Ratele and Rustin (2023) argue that culture is a crucial factor in understanding happiness, implying that people perceive happiness or pleasure differently based on their unique sociocultural factors. The major pitfalls of Western thought on happiness, according to Ratele and Rustin (2023), are restricting happiness to subjective well-being. However, the African conceptualization extends beyond an individual and affirms that one might not be truly happy when living in a largely unhappy world or environment. The Eastern perspective on happiness closely mirrors that of Africa, with contrasting the Western thought as linking happiness with virtues, rationality, and individual autonomy, while Eastern traditions emphasize holistic well-being, spiritual enlightenment, and general interconnectedness.

The differences between the Western and African perspectives prompt the African to explore the roots of happiness based on the prevailing culture. Just like the Western and Eastern perspectives, the African understanding of happiness has evolved over many centuries. However, Idemudia and Adedeji (2023) complain that many Africans have increasingly turned to Western thought when focusing on the subject of well-being, and this is reflected in the definitions of happiness and measurement used. The remedy of this problem lies in the application of indigenous knowledge, which, according to Oni & Olalere (2024), could be an integral aspect in realizing the survival of man, with the beliefs that have been institutionalized within their respective culture and community. Africans, therefore, must not look to the West or East to try to define the meaning of happiness and how it can be attained. The African must look within and use the local knowledge and culture as the primary tool with which to measure happiness and understand how to pursue it.

4.2.2 Commercialization and Marketization of Higher Education

The discussion on happiness, especially in higher education, cannot proceed without an understanding of the commercialization and marketization of these establishments. In their discussion on the same topic, Elwick and Cannizzaro (2017) lament about the gradual move towards consumerism within the sector and the growing marketization. The authors, focusing on the United Kingdom, suggest that marketization has changed the primary means through which academicians can pursue happiness and contentment (Elwick & Cannizzaro, 2017). The study also introduces the increasing emphasis on satisfaction and not happiness. For example, multiple measurement methods have been developed to gauge students' satisfaction, and this has occurred at the expense of happiness. To this end, Elwick and Cannizzaro (2017) conclude that the UK lacks the general understanding of happiness, and this is evidently a global and not just a local concern.

In a 2005 study, Chan et al. (2005) committed the error explained by Elwick and Cannizzaro (2017) by equating student happiness with satisfaction. Chan et al. (2005) reveal that Australian students face a myriad of challenges, ranging from increasing fees to failure to attain desired grades. However, the authors avow that students are more likely to be satisfied with their educational experiences if the government and other stakeholders can boost satisfaction by looking at a number of factors, including friendships, improving school facilities, boosting lecture quality, and providing more opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities (Chan et al., 2005). As Elwick and Cannizzaro (2017) explain, the concept of satisfaction, as evident in this context, is more linked to consumerism, as students are expected to be

satisfied with the services they receive. The focus on satisfaction, therefore, fails to consider the enjoyment and achievement that are linked to learning.

In a study focusing on the United Arab Emirates, Alteneiji et al. (2023) adopt the concept of the eudemonistic perspective of happiness, affirming that happiness originates from the attainment of significant goals. Alteneiji et al. (2023) dive into the issue of satisfaction and happiness, especially exploring how this has been explained in major UK universities. The authors suggest that students who appear happier are content with how they are engaged and with the edifying experiences they encounter when learning. In contrast, those who are highly satisfied are concerned mainly with external loci, which causes them to lose sight of their engagement in this process and instead focus on how things are done to and for them. To this end, Alteneiji et al. (2023) conclude that there is a distinction between satisfaction and happiness in this context. Notably, the emphasis on satisfaction, according to Alteneiji et al. (2023), is aimed at university management and policymakers. Indeed, this is also asserted by Elwick and Cannizzaro (2017), who reveal that satisfaction is mentioned 53 times, for example, in the University Survey National Report, while happiness is not mentioned in the same report. The same issue is evident in surveys conducted in the United States, Canada, and other European nations, where the emphasis is on satisfaction and not happiness.

Munene (2015) reports the commercialization of the university in the global and African context. The author indicates that the university's interaction with the market has resulted in major transformations, which have redefined the role and mission of these institutions. For example, according to Munene (2015), Kenya and Uganda have embraced a more radical approach, with other nations like Tanzania adopting a moderate approach. Gupta (2018) supports Munene (2015) by affirming that the shift from government-supported services compelled universities to enter the marketplace. As a result, universities have become big businesses that are now aggressively marketing their services and turning into iconic brands within their regions. One of the consequences of marketization, according to Munene (2015), is the reduction of academic freedom and autonomy, with universities adopting multiple incentives to sanction the right behavior. However, Munene (2015) argues that the commercialization process is different in various African nations due to local politics and the paths that were adopted after independence. For example, Kenya adopted a capitalistic approach, while Tanzania favored socialism.

Gachie and Govender (2017) affirm that the commercialization of higher education institutions is also evident in South Africa. For example, between 2001 and 2007, South African universities experienced remarkable changes as the government spearheaded the restructuring of these entities and organized the merger of universities to promote efficiency. The process saw the reduction of universities from 36 to 23 through the described mechanisms (Gachie & Govender, 2017). However, as Khumalo and Du Plessis (2024) explain, South African universities have focused on the commercialization of innovation, with more calls for these establishments to be more creative, entrepreneurial, and to focus on producing new knowledge and innovation.

Remarkably, Methula (2017) contends that the commercialization and commodification of universities is an agenda that originated and was driven by the Bretton Woods institutions and is a success of the neoliberal socioeconomic discussions. The same position is maintained by Voutsas et al. (2014), who confirm that some of these institutions, like the International Monetary Fund, intervene in education policy matters, with member states having the role of implementing specified measures. Munene (2015) also traces the gradual commercialization of Kenyan and other African universities to the 1980s, with the IMF and World Bank introducing structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that affected higher education and promoted market-based competition. However, one could contend that, as Bok (2009) explains, commercialization has taken root due to universities' losing sight of their core mission and sprawling institutions focusing entirely on material pursuits. Bok (2009) observes that the gradual reduction in government spending in universities across the US, UK, the Netherlands, Australia, and Scandinavian nations compelled these institutions to become more entrepreneurial.

In the face of this overwhelming focus on the marketplace, it does not come as a surprise that the focus has been on satisfaction as opposed to happiness when focusing on higher education institutions. According to Elwick and Cannizzaro (2017), satisfaction, unlike eudaimonic happiness, is a limited and also limiting concept. The focus is more on consumer expectations and their experiences as defined in consumer theory. Besides, the emphasis has been on student happiness, with limited research on staff happiness within these establishments. At the core of this discussion is the question of whether the university, with its focus on the marketplace and profits, can continue to promote happiness not only to students but also to academic staff.

4.2.3 Indigenous Knowledge and Happiness in Higher Education

Remarkably, having touched on the concept of happiness and the commercialization of higher education, it is imperative to explore how the concept of indigenous knowledge has been applied in the pursuit of happiness in higher education. In a recent study, Deepa (2025) focused on the Indian indigenous knowledge and how it affects teachers' well-being and happiness index. The study, adopting a literature review approach, affirmed that indigenous knowledge helped relieve stress, bridge the gap between knowledge and wisdom, and foster emotional and social connectivity. One

of the key takeaways was on how indigenous knowledge emphasizes the need for people to have a higher purpose and seek meaning in their daily activities, an outcome that leads to selfless service and the ability to align personal values and aspirations. Some of the indigenous knowledge and traditions that Deepa (2025) explored included Yoga, Ayurvedic home remedies, and how education was organized in the traditional Indian system. Remarkably, the study falls short of explaining how indigenous knowledge can be applied in complex education systems, and it also lacks a robust methodology section. Besides, it is not clear how some of these principles can be applied to non-Indian contexts, such as in African nations.

Daroin and Aprilya (2022), focusing on the Indonesian education system, also confirm the essence of happiness in higher education and the role of indigenous knowledge in attaining it. Daroin and Aprilya (2022) contend that education must be offered in the natural context, a position that is enshrined in Ki Hadjar Dewantara's learning concept. In a 1947 guideline, Ki Hadjar Dewantara underlined the need for education to prioritize love and affection. In this setting, teachers acted as parents and students as their children. Not only should teachers encourage students during learning, but they must also act as role models. Daroin and Aprilya (2022) contend that, based on these principles, it might be challenging to separate education from the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. The holistic approach, which is a major deviation from the commercialized, modern education system, is essential in promoting happiness in this sector. Indeed, as the authors note, educational development needs a cultural system as its root and support. At the core of this system is the role of indigenous knowledge, which underlines the need for Indonesia to have an education system that helps students to be independent, socialize, and learn to regulate themselves. Happiness and freedom, therefore, become a product of such an education system. Generally, it is not evident if these outcomes can be applied beyond Indonesia, especially to African cultures that do not have a similar conceptualization of education and happiness.

In their study, Sherab and Schuelka (2023) explore happiness among Bhutanese students. Despite Bhutan being classified as one of the happiest countries, Sherab and Schuelka (2023) gathered data from 240 teachers and students to understand if they were happy. Indeed, other studies, for example, Ferraris and Cristiano (2024), have cited traditional knowledge and its incorporation into government policies as being one of the key factors for promoting happiness in this country. In collaborating these findings, Chophel et al. (2024) indicate that the combination of indigenous knowledge and spirituality and its integration into the public health and governance system have made Bhutan attain a higher happiness index compared to other nations. Despite all these attainments, Sherab and Schuelka (2023) suggest that happiness in the education system has not been fully attained or guaranteed. In fact, the authors contend that teachers as a source of authority, focus on pure academic attainments, and system rigidity have left the country's education system with less space for happiness. In another study, Schuelka and Sherab (2022) help us understand that the lack of happiness in this system is primarily due to failures in introducing education reforms in Bhutan, focused on the gross national happiness. Hence, schools and teachers tend to perceive happiness as an extra element rather than a construct to be integrated into daily education. It is interesting that a nation christened 'Land of Happiness' is far from attaining this in its education system.

Although the study by Macfarlane et al. (2008) does not explicitly focus on the concept of happiness, it provides crucial lessons on the need to incorporate the indigenous epistemology into the national curriculum. Macfarlane et al. (2008) cite the Māori cultural worldview, which emphasizes the value of human relationships. The perspective demands that education should be holistic, experiential, collective, and dependent on the free exchange of learning and teaching. The failure to adopt this kind of learning leads to major issues, as Rameka (2011) explains in a past study. According to Rameka (2011), the continued underachievement of Māori students has mainly been due to the lack of culturally relevant assessments that do not make any sense to these students. The author concludes on the need to make learning and assessment materials that reflect on what it means to be a member of this community and support the ideals and aspirations of these children. Collectively, Rameka (2011) and Macfarlane et al. (2008) imply that a curriculum that fails to incorporate local or indigenous knowledge might not cater to everyone's needs. Indeed, it is expected that students who do poorly in such educational contexts and teachers who fail to get their desired performance objectives are not likely to be happy.

Remarkably, Lee (2017), in a descriptive position paper, argued for the need for universities to teach happiness and wisdom, particularly from a religious perspective. The author adopted two religious approaches: Buddhism and Christianity. The adoption of spirituality in education is not a new concept, with scholars like Boolaghi and Kiani Moghadam (2016) confirming that religion-based interventions could improve happiness in students. Lee (2017) reveals that happiness is the ultimate human goal, and education has become the primary tool for attaining happiness. Happiness might not be achieved in higher education without direct instruction on how learners can attain and maintain happiness. Indeed, this requires careful ethical guidelines and other parameters to ensure only sage wisdom and moral guidelines are taught in these educational establishments. Despite not focusing entirely on indigenous knowledge, Lee (2017) helps us understand that there is a need to change the academic curriculum to reflect religious knowledge that might not be directly captured within scientific knowledge or technology. Evidently, the author seeks to marry the religious doctrines



of the East and West when he focuses on these two religious beliefs. However, it is evident that even nations like Korea, despite major technological advancements, have not attained desired happiness levels in their higher education, prompting Lee (2017) to recommend this unique approach.

In the African context, there has been limited focus on how indigenous knowledge can foster happiness within the higher education setting. In a recent book, Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) laments that Western education, which belittles Africa's authentic experiences and repudiates its originality, has failed in promoting the innovation and advancement of African societies as it was expected. Under this education system, Africans lived experiences, belief systems, cultural values, and educational curriculum and structures have long been considered backward, barbaric, and unscientific. Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) affirms that the colonially established and post-colonially maintained education system continues to promote the European psyche, with indigenous knowledge systems, which are typically expected to form the foundation of this education system, being intentionally and consistently relegated to inferior positions. Consider the fact that mother tongue is banned in most educational establishments in Africa, for example, in Rwanda (Sibomana & Uwambayinema, 2016), Nigeria (Sanusi, 2019), Kenya (Sibomana, 2015), Uganda (Ssentanda & Nakayiza, 2017), and so forth. Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) concludes that there is a disconnect between the education curriculum in Africa and how it should incorporate its indigenous knowledge systems. Truly, a continent that has been continually informed about the inferiority of its indigenous knowledge systems, as Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) shows, cannot be expected to use the same approaches to improve research, innovation, and curricula. Remarkably, it is unsurprising that no studies have focused on the concept of indigenous knowledge and how it can enhance happiness within higher education organizations on the continent.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

In the end, happiness is a primary emotion of learning that is crucial in promoting the attainment of educational goals. The systematic review has revealed that happiness is not inherent in African or global education systems. As a result, there is a need to redevelop curricula and improve educational systems to ensure that learners and teachers are happy. Unfortunately, the marketization of higher education has disrupted the traditional running of universities, with the focus being on profitability and other financial metrics. Fortunately, indigenous knowledge proves to be a silver bullet in helping educational establishments to attain higher levels of happiness. Indigenous knowledge has been applied in education systems in India, Indonesia, and elsewhere, with the results showing that students and academicians can become happier when they are in harmony with themselves, others, nature, and in their spiritual states. The African university, therefore, must move with speed to explore the best way of entrenching indigenous knowledge to promote happiness within its ranks and in the classroom.

5.2 Recommendations

Specifically, this review reveals that indigenous knowledge has been applied in different regions like India and Indonesia, with positive outcomes in educational contexts. However, as the Bhutan case scenario reveals, happiness in higher education, even when nations have the highest happiness index, is not automatic. Instead, there is a need to entrench indigenous knowledge and local wisdom into the curriculum and teaching activities to ensure that both learners and teachers are happy. Indeed, the analysis has disclosed that there is a major difference between African and Western conceptualizations of happiness. As a result, Africans must be left to local or indigenous knowledge to formulate the best approaches to attain happiness within the education system. Significantly, this review demonstrates that no studies are focusing on how indigenous knowledge can be used to improve happiness in African education systems. Consequently, there is a need for empirical studies, either qualitative or quantitative, which will focus on the concept of happiness and how it can be attained through localized, indigenous knowledge.

The review discloses that major attempts in evaluating the emotions of learning in most educational institutions have focused on satisfaction. As explained, satisfaction and happiness do not mean the same thing. Hence, there is a need to conduct qualitative and quantitative studies to explore happiness and not simply satisfaction rates within African higher education organizations. The focus on happiness, as this review has shown, will ensure that scholars go beyond the commercialization or marketization aspects, which are confined to the consumer theory. The studies focusing on these variables could either target students or academicians, especially the latter, since they have been adversely affected by the commercialization of these institutions.

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