

Employability Skills, Knowledge Domestication, and the African Narrative

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Abstract: *The persistent challenge of unemployment in Africa has intensified discussions around employability skills, knowledge production, and the need to reshape dominant narratives about the continent. This paper is set out to examine the relationship between employability skills, knowledge domestication, and the African narrative within the context of socio-economic development. Historical method was used to collect data relying on primary and secondary source of historical information the conceptual framework on which the paper is hinged centered on Human Capital Theory while Decolonial Theory was the theoretical framework on which the paper is anchored. The author addressed the link between unemployment and skill acquisition through indigenous knowledge. Findings of the paper reveals that improving employability requires not only technical and soft skills but also educational systems that domesticate knowledge that reflect African realities. Integration indigenous knowledge systems, culturally relevant pedagogies, and local development priorities through African institutions can better prepare graduates for the labor market. In addition, reclaiming the African narrative is crucial for redefining Africa's identity in global discourse and promoting innovative solutions to local challenges. The paper concludes that a holistic approach combining skills development, contextualized knowledge production, and narrative transformation is essential for sustainable development and economic empowerment in Africa. Based on the discussions of this paper it was recommended that African government and institutions should be proactive in designing the educational system to address the local peculiarities and current realities by blending the school curriculum to reflect the indigenous and western knowledge.*

Keywords: African narratives, skills development, indigenous knowledge, entrepreneurship and innovations

INTRODUCTION

International development reports confirmed that Africa has one of the youngest populations in the world, yet millions of graduates' struggle to secure employment due to a mismatch between the skills acquired in educational institutions and the demands of the labor market (World Economic Forum, 2020). Across Africa, unemployment and underemployment remain major socio-economic concerns, particularly among young people and university graduates. This challenge has brought increased attention to the concept of employability skills, which encompass both technical competencies and transferable skills necessary for workplace success.

Historically, the employability crisis cannot be understood solely as a problem of skills deficiency. It is also deeply connected to broader issues surrounding knowledge production, education systems, and historical legacies. African education systems were largely shaped during the colonial era and were designed to serve colonial administrative needs rather than the developmental priorities of African societies (Dei, 2011). Consequently, many curricula remained heavily influenced by Western epistemologies and frameworks, often neglecting indigenous knowledge systems and local contexts. This situation has led scholars to advocate for knowledge domestication, a process that involves adapting global knowledge to local realities and integrating indigenous knowledge systems into formal education. Knowledge domestication aims to make education more relevant, practical, and responsive to societal needs.

In addition to these educational concerns, there is a growing movement to redefine the African narrative. For decades, Africa has frequently been portrayed in global discourse through narratives of poverty, dependency, and crisis. African scholars and intellectuals argue that such portrayals distort the continent's complexity and undermine its intellectual and developmental potential (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Reclaiming the African narrative involves producing knowledge from African perspectives and emphasizing the continent's resilience, creativity, and capacity for innovation.

Furthermore, global narratives about Africa have often been shaped by external perspectives that portray the continent primarily through lenses of poverty, conflict, and dependency. Scholars such as Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argue that reclaiming the African narrative is essential for promoting intellectual independence and fostering development strategies grounded in African realities.

Statement of the Problem

Graduate unemployment remains one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges across many African countries. Despite the increasing number of graduates produced by higher education institutions each year, many employers continue to report difficulties in finding graduates with the necessary skills required in the labor market. This situation has created a significant gap between

academic training and workplace expectations. The problem is not only the shortage of employment opportunities but also the mismatch between the skills graduates possess and those demanded by employers.

This paper explores the intersections between employability skills, knowledge domestication, and the African narrative. It examines how these concepts collectively contribute to addressing unemployment, transforming education systems, and promoting sustainable development in Africa.

Research Objectives

The general objectives of this study is to examine the relationship between employability skills, knowledge domestication, and the African Narrative in enhancing graduate employability and promoting sustainable development in Africa.

1. To examine the concept and importance of employability skills in contemporary labor markets.
2. To analyze the role of African tertiary institutions in developing employability skills among graduates.
3. To investigate the concept of knowledge domestication and its relevance to African education systems.
4. To explore how the African narratives influences knowledge production and development strategies.
5. To evaluate integration of employability skills and domesticated knowledge in enhancing innovation and entrepreneurship in Africa.

Research Questions

1. Explain the concept and importance of employability skills in contemporary labor markets.
2. What are the specific roles of African Tertiary Institutions in developing employability skills among graduates?
3. Examine the concept of knowledge domestication and its relevance to African education systems.
4. Explore how the linkage between African narratives influences knowledge production and development strategies.
5. To what extent is triple Helix employability skills and domesticated knowledge in enhancing innovation and entrepreneurship in Africa.

METHODOLOGY

Historical method was used to collect data for the study whereby the authors rely mainly on primarily and secondary data sources which include, academic journal, books and scholarly publications, reports from international organizations and policy documents related to education

and employment in Africa also data was collected through documentary analysis, which involves reviewing relevant literature, policy documents, and scholarly works. This approach enables the researcher to identify key themes, arguments, and perspectives related to employability skills, knowledge domestication, and African narratives. While thematic analysis was used which involves identifying recurring patterns, themes, and concepts within the literature. Through thematic analysis, the researcher can synthesize different viewpoints and develop a comprehensive understanding of the paper

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptualizing Employability Skills

Employability skills refer to the attributes, competencies, and personal qualities that enable individuals to obtain and maintain employment while contributing effectively to organizational goals (Yorke, 2006). These skills are often categorized into hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills refer to technical or specialized knowledge required for specific professions. Examples include engineering design, data analysis, accounting, and medical procedures. Soft skills, on the other hand, refer to interpersonal and cognitive abilities that enhance workplace performance. These include communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

In recent years, employers across the world have emphasized the importance of soft skills alongside technical competence. The World Economic Forum identifies analytical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence, and digital literacy as some of the most essential skills for the modern workforce (World Economic Forum, 2020). In Africa, however, many graduates lack these competencies due to the theoretical orientation of many educational programs. Universities often emphasize rote learning and examination performance rather than practical problem-solving and innovation. Consequently, graduates may possess academic knowledge but lack the practical abilities required in the workplace.

This disconnect between education and employment is commonly referred to as the skills mismatch. Employers frequently report difficulty finding graduates who possess the necessary skills, while graduates themselves struggle to secure employment opportunities. To address this problem, many African governments and universities have begun incorporating entrepreneurship education, vocational training, internships, and experiential learning into their curricula. These initiatives aim to equip students with practical skills and encourage them to become job creators rather than job seekers.

Employability Skills are the essential abilities, attributes, and personal qualities that enable individuals to obtain employment and perform effectively in the workplace. These skills go beyond technical knowledge and include a range of transferable competencies that are valued across

different industries and professions. In the field of Workforce Development, employability skills are considered critical for preparing individuals to succeed in modern work environments (Yorke, 2006).

One key component of employability skills is communication. Effective communication involves the ability to express ideas clearly, listen actively, and interact respectfully with colleagues, supervisors, and clients. Good communication skills help build strong professional relationships and ensure that tasks and responsibilities are understood and completed efficiently. Teamwork is another important employability skill. Most workplaces require employees to collaborate with others to achieve common goals. The ability to work effectively in teams involves cooperation, respect for different perspectives, and the willingness to share responsibilities. Employees who demonstrate strong teamwork skills contribute to a positive and productive work environment.

Historical Antecedent of Antecedents of Skill Development, Indigenous Education and African Narrative.

Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous Knowledge refers to the local knowledge systems developed by indigenous or local communities through long-term interaction with their natural and social environments. This knowledge is usually accumulated over generations and transmitted through oral traditions, cultural practices, rituals, and community activities. It encompasses a wide range of areas such as agriculture, health care, environmental conservation, and social governance. Scholars in Indigenous Knowledge Studies emphasize that indigenous knowledge is deeply rooted in cultural traditions and reflects the lived experiences of communities (Warren, 1991). One of the main characteristics of indigenous knowledge is that it is context-specific and closely tied to the local environment. Communities use this knowledge to manage natural resources, predict weather patterns, and practice sustainable agriculture. For example, many African communities rely on traditional farming techniques and natural indicators to determine planting seasons and harvest times. These practices have been developed through centuries of observation and adaptation to local conditions (Nakashima, Prott, & Bridgewater, 2012).

Another important aspect of indigenous knowledge is its role in preserving cultural identity and social values. Through storytelling, proverbs, and community rituals, indigenous knowledge helps maintain cultural heritage and strengthens the bond between generations. It teaches moral values, social responsibilities, and respect for nature, which are essential for maintaining social harmony within communities. Despite its importance, indigenous knowledge has often been undervalued or overlooked in formal education and development programs. However, there is growing recognition of its significance in sustainable development and environmental management. Integrating indigenous knowledge with modern scientific knowledge can provide more effective and culturally

appropriate solutions to global challenges such as climate change and food security (Warren, 1991; Nakashima et al., 2012).

African Narratives

African Narratives refer to the stories, oral traditions, literature, and cultural expressions that communicate the history, values, and experiences of African societies. For centuries, storytelling has been a central part of African culture, serving as a means of education, entertainment, and preservation of history. These narratives often include folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, and songs that reflect the worldview of African communities. Scholars in African Literature note that African narratives are essential for understanding the cultural identity and historical experiences of African people (Irele & Gikandi, 2010).

Traditionally, African narratives were transmitted orally by storytellers, elders, and griots who played an important role in preserving community history and knowledge. These storytellers used creative language, music, and performance to make the stories memorable and engaging. Through these narratives, important lessons about morality, leadership, courage, and community cooperation were passed on to younger generations. African narratives also serve as a powerful tool for cultural preservation and identity formation. They help communities maintain their traditions and values in the face of social change and globalization. Many narratives highlight themes such as respect for elders, communal living, justice, and the relationship between humans and nature, which are central elements of African cultural philosophy.

In modern times, African narratives have expanded beyond oral storytelling into written literature, film, theatre, and digital media. Prominent African writers have used literature to tell African stories from African perspectives, addressing themes such as colonialism, independence, social inequality, and cultural transformation. These narratives help challenge stereotypes and present a more authentic representation of African societies.

African narratives also play an important role in education and knowledge production. They provide insight into African history, cultural diversity, and social values, making them valuable resources for teaching and research. By incorporating African narratives into academic studies and cultural programs, societies can promote cultural awareness and appreciation of Africa's rich heritage (Achebe, 1958; Irele & Gikandi, 2010).

Skill Development

Skill Development refers to the process of learning, improving, and enhancing abilities that enable individuals to perform tasks effectively in various aspects of life. These skills may include technical, vocational, cognitive, and interpersonal skills. Skill development is considered a crucial element in personal growth, educational advancement, and economic development. In the field of Human Resource Development, skill development is viewed as essential for preparing individuals

to meet the demands of modern workplaces (Noe, 2017). One major aspect of skill development is the acquisition of technical or hard skills. These are specialized skills required to perform specific tasks or professions, such as computer programming, engineering, carpentry, or accounting. Technical skills are usually learned through formal education, vocational training, or practical work experience. As technology continues to evolve, individuals must continuously update their technical skills to remain competitive in the labor market.

Skill development also includes soft skills, which are personal and interpersonal abilities that influence how individuals interact with others and perform in professional environments. Examples of soft skills include communication, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and time management. These skills are highly valued by employers because they contribute to effective collaboration and productivity within organizations. Another important element of skill development is lifelong learning. In today's rapidly changing world, individuals need to continuously learn new skills and adapt to changing technologies and job requirements. Governments, educational institutions, and organizations play an important role in providing training programs and opportunities that support skill development throughout a person's career. Overall, skill development contributes significantly to economic growth and social progress. A skilled workforce increases productivity, innovation, and competitiveness within an economy. For this reason, many countries invest in education and vocational training programs aimed at developing the skills needed for sustainable development and employment opportunities (World Bank, 2019; Noe, 2017).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by two major theoretical perspectives which are Human Capital Theory and Decolonial Theory.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, developed by economists such as Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz, emphasizes the role of education and skills development in improving productivity and economic growth. According to this theory, investment in education and training enhances the knowledge and skills of individuals, thereby increasing their ability to contribute to economic development. Within the context of this study, Human Capital Theory helps explain the importance of employability skills in preparing graduates for the labor market. When educational institutions invest in developing both technical and transferable skills, graduates become more competitive and capable of contributing to economic development. However, critics argue that traditional interpretations of Human Capital Theory often overlook cultural and contextual factors influencing education and employment. This limitation highlights the need to complement the theory with perspectives that recognize the importance of local knowledge systems.

It further explains how investment in education, training, and skills development improves the productivity and economic value of individuals. The theory argues that individuals acquire knowledge, competencies, and abilities through education and training, which enhance their capacity to perform tasks effectively in the labor market. The theory was prominently developed by economists Gary Becker (1964) and Theodore Schultz (1961), who emphasized that education should be viewed as an investment rather than merely consumption. According to this perspective, resources spent on schooling, professional training, and health development increase workers' productivity and contribute to national economic growth. In the context of employability studies, Human Capital Theory highlights the importance of developing relevant skills and competencies that improve graduates' chances of obtaining and sustaining employment. By investing in education and skill development, individuals increase their human capital, which leads to better job opportunities, higher income, and improved economic development.

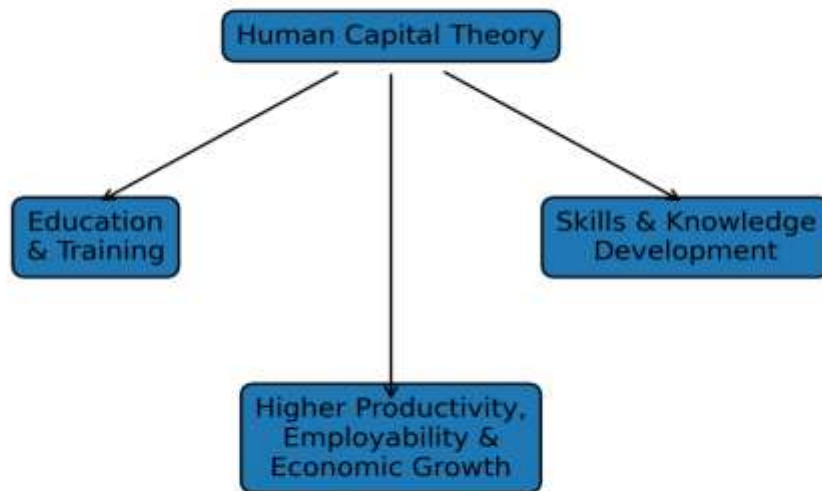


Fig 1: Conceptual Diagram of Human Capital Theory

Source: Olayanju, (2026)

Decolonial Theory

Decolonial Theory provides a critical framework for examining the historical and structural influences of colonialism on knowledge production and education systems. Scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni emphasize the need to challenge the dominance of Western epistemologies and promote indigenous knowledge systems. Decolonial theory argues that knowledge production in Africa has long been shaped by colonial power structures that

marginalized African perspectives and experiences. As a result, African education systems often reflect foreign models that may not align with local realities. Applying this theory to the present study highlights the importance of knowledge domestication, which involves adapting global knowledge to African contexts and integrating indigenous knowledge into formal education. It also supports the development of an African narrative that reflects African histories, cultures, and development priorities.

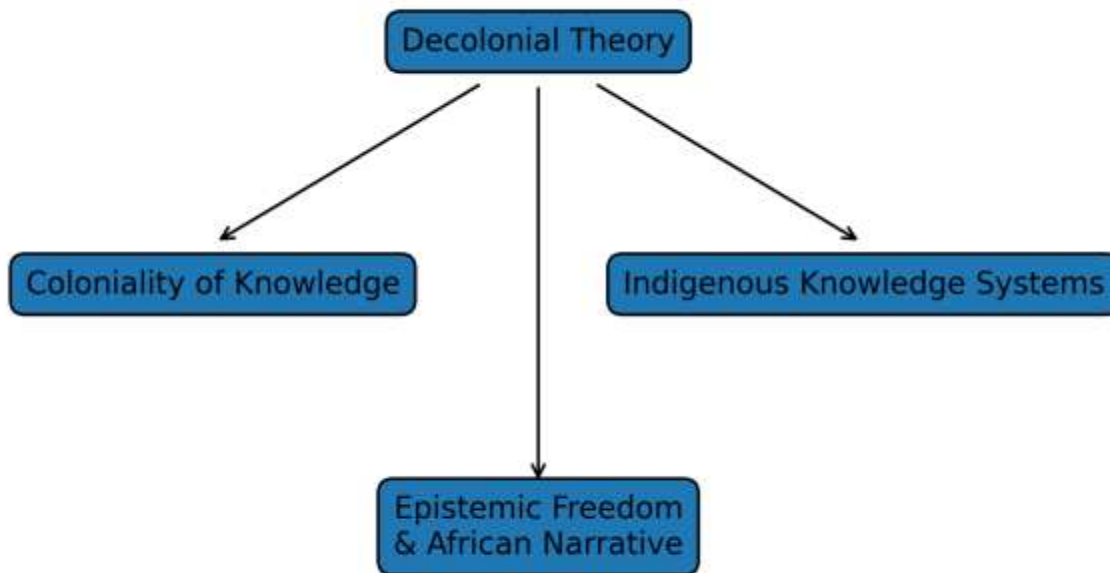


Fig 2: Conceptual Diagram of Decolonial Theory

Source: Olaynaju (2026)

Relevance of the Theoretical Framework to the Study

The combination of Human Capital Theory and Decolonial Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the issues addressed in this research. While Human Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of skills development for economic productivity, Decolonial Theory highlights the need to contextualize knowledge and education within African realities. Together, these theories help explain how integrating employability skills with domesticated knowledge

systems can enhance graduate employability, foster innovation, and promote sustainable development in Africa.

The Role of Education in Skills Development

Education plays a central role in developing employability skills. Universities and other higher education institutions serve as critical spaces for knowledge creation, skills development, and professional preparation. However, critics argue that many African education systems remain disconnected from the realities of local economies. Oketch, McCowan, and Schendel (2014) note that higher education institutions in many African countries often operate within rigid academic frameworks that prioritize theoretical knowledge over applied learning.

Several factors contribute to this challenge:

1. Limited collaboration between universities and industries
2. Inadequate funding for research and innovation
3. Outdated curricula that do not reflect contemporary labor market needs
4. Insufficient emphasis on entrepreneurship and technological skills

Knowledge Domestication in African Education

Knowledge domestication refers to the process of adapting global knowledge to local cultural, social, and economic contexts. Rather than simply importing foreign models of education, domestication involves critically engaging with external knowledge while integrating indigenous perspectives and experiences (Nyamnjoh, 2012).

Historically, colonial education systems in Africa prioritized European languages, knowledge systems, and worldviews while marginalizing indigenous knowledge. This created a situation where education became disconnected from local realities.

Indigenous knowledge systems encompass a wide range of practices and understandings developed by communities over generations. These include traditional agricultural methods, environmental management practices, medicinal knowledge, and conflict resolution mechanisms. Integrating indigenous knowledge into formal education can provide several benefits:

1. It enhances the relevance of education to local communities.
2. It promotes cultural identity and intellectual autonomy.
3. It supports sustainable development by utilizing locally appropriate solutions.

For example, indigenous agricultural practices such as crop rotation, mixed farming, and traditional water management systems have been shown to enhance environmental sustainability and food security (Altieri & Toledo, 2011).

By incorporating such knowledge into agricultural education programs, universities can equip students with practical skills that are directly applicable to local farming systems.

Decolonizing Knowledge Production

The call for knowledge domestication is closely linked to broader efforts to decolonize knowledge production in Africa. Decolonization involves challenging the dominance of Western epistemologies and creating space for diverse forms of knowledge. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) argued that colonial education systems not only imposed foreign knowledge but also undermined African languages and cultural identities. According to him, reclaiming indigenous languages and knowledge systems is essential for intellectual liberation. Similarly, scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) emphasize the importance of epistemic freedom, which refers to the ability of African scholars and institutions to define their own intellectual agendas and frameworks.

Decolonizing knowledge does not imply rejecting Western knowledge entirely. Instead, it involves creating a balanced system where multiple knowledge traditions coexist and inform each other. Such an approach can enrich academic discourse while ensuring that knowledge production remains relevant to African contexts.

The African Narrative and Knowledge Representation

The concept of the African narrative refers to the stories, perspectives, and representations through which Africa is understood both within the continent and globally. Historically, Africa has often been portrayed in international media and academic literature as a continent characterized by poverty, conflict, and underdevelopment. While these challenges are real, such narratives frequently ignore Africa's achievements, diversity, and potential.

African scholars argue that controlling the narrative is crucial for shaping global perceptions and influencing development policies. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) emphasizes that Africa must move beyond externally imposed narratives and develop its own frameworks for understanding its history, culture, and future.

The rise of African literature, film, and scholarship has played an important role in reshaping these narratives. African writers, filmmakers, and intellectuals increasingly produce works that highlight the continent's creativity, resilience, and innovation. These narratives not only influence global perceptions but also shape how Africans view themselves and their capabilities.

Linking Employability Skills with the African Narrative

Employability skills and the African narrative are interconnected in several ways. First, education systems that reflect African realities can better prepare students to address local challenges. When students learn about their own histories, cultures, and socio-economic environments, they develop a stronger sense of identity and purpose. This can enhance creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurial thinking.

Second, promoting positive African narratives can encourage young people to pursue opportunities within their communities rather than seeking opportunities abroad. Many African graduates aspire to migrate to Western countries due to perceptions that opportunities are limited at home.

By highlighting successful African entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders, educational institutions can inspire students to contribute to local development.

Third, narratives influence policy priorities. Governments that embrace African-centered development narratives are more likely to invest in sectors such as agriculture, technology, and renewable energy that align with local needs.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Africa

Entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a key strategy for addressing unemployment in Africa. Rather than relying solely on formal employment opportunities, young people are encouraged to create their own businesses and generate employment for others. Entrepreneurship education has therefore become an important component of many university programs across the continent.

Knowledge domestication plays a crucial role in entrepreneurship by encouraging solutions that are tailored to local contexts. For example, innovations in mobile banking, agricultural technology, and renewable energy have emerged from African entrepreneurs responding to local challenges.

These innovations demonstrate the importance of combining global technological knowledge with local insights.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite the growing recognition of these ideas, several challenges hinder their implementation. One major challenge is the persistence of colonial educational structures. Many African universities continue to rely heavily on curricula and teaching methods inherited from colonial systems. Another challenge is limited funding for research and innovation. Many universities lack the resources necessary to support cutting-edge research and practical training programs. Additionally, there is often insufficient collaboration between universities, industries, and governments. Effective skills development requires strong partnerships among these stakeholders.

Finally, globalization presents both opportunities and challenges. While global knowledge and technologies can enhance development, excessive reliance on external models may undermine local knowledge systems.

CONCLUSION

Employability skills, knowledge domestication, and the African narrative are deeply interconnected concepts that play a crucial role in Africa's socio-economic transformation.

Addressing the continent's unemployment challenges requires more than simply expanding educational opportunities. It requires rethinking the nature of education itself.

By integrating practical skills, entrepreneurship, and experiential learning into educational programs, universities can better prepare graduates for the labor market. At the same time, domestication of knowledge ensures that education remains relevant to local contexts and development priorities.

Reclaiming the African narrative further strengthens this process by empowering Africans to define their own intellectual and developmental trajectories.

Together, these approaches can help build a knowledge economy that reflects Africa's unique realities while enabling the continent to compete effectively in the global arena.

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