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ANALYSIS OF DECOLONISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN A NEW SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the issue of decolonising higher education and how a new university can possibly respond to this call through the teaching and learning, assessment, curriculum development and the research process. Using a qualitative research methodology, the study interrogated the perspectives of 10 senior academics from one new comprehensive university, who were purposively selected to participate in the study. The study used Antonio Gramsci (1971) cultural hegemony theory as the lens with which to make sense of the data. Data were analysed using the thematic approach, with themes that emerged from the interviews forming the basis of the discussion of the results. Data were also analysed using verbatim statements from the participants. The participants interviewed emphasised that the decolonisation of the higher education system was not only urgent but also long overdue. It came out clearly that academics remain the vanguard of the decolonisation project given their critical role as teachers, curriculum developers, assessors and researchers. The study therefore recommended that all progressive forces including students, academics, university leaders and the public must adopt non-violent intellectual and evidence-based approaches to the decolonisation campaign.

Key words: decolonisation, curriculum, higher education, hegemony

1 INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of 2016, the entire South African higher education (HE) sector was engulfed by potent student protests which were driven by the need for a fee-free decolonised higher education (HE) system. The protests were of different magnitude across institutions and their manifestations ranged from marches, disruption of the academic project, destruction and incineration of university property and infrastructure. The students were so resolute in their demands and efforts such that it became more of a coordinated movement rather than isolated efforts of individual groups of students.

In order to understand the essence of decolonisation, one needs to understand the essence of European colonialism and its impact on the education, knowledge and cultural system in African societies. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2012) exposits, the decolonial perspective seeks to address the problem of coloniality of knowledge which took the form of invasion of mental universe

of the colonised Africans. This is important if higher education system is to succeed in serving as a transformative tool that levels the existing unequal social structure in South Africa and other post-colonial States of Africa. Although South Africa is an independent state, it is important that the remnants of colonialism that are perpetuated through social institutions including the HE system be examined and addressed so that the education system serves the interests of a broad-based and inclusive society

The CHE (2013), in its motivation for the adoption of a flexible curriculum structure in South African universities, observed that "…the origins of South Africa's current higher education curriculum structures lie in the adoption, early in the twentieth century, of the Scottish educational framework owing to colonial ties.'' It further notes that the structure and assumptions of the core degrees in universities were set many decades ago, predicated on a largely homogeneous intake with middle-class cultural capital. Given the changes that have happened both outside and inside the HE system since 1994, the need to review the extent to which the present curriculum structures, assumptions and values meet the needs of the contemporary society becomes more urgent than ever before.

This research therefore explores the issue of decolonising higher education at a new university with a view to understand academics' conceptualisations of decolonising HE, approaches to decolonisation as well as the role of different stakeholders in decolonising HE.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The issue of decolonising higher education, including the decolonization of knowledge and curricula, has gained significant attention in South Africa in the past five years or so. Among other factors that have made this particular issue critical is the Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall movements (Mbembe, 2015). Many scholars have taken this up and various books and special issues of journals have been published, as well as many other materials. It should however be acknowledged that the movements that have given traction to the issue of decolonising knowledge are actually informed by scholarship on this matter which is not new. Prominent scholars who have contributed to the growth of scholarship on this matter include Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), Santos (2014), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2012), and Somo (2016). The critical thing to note is that all these scholars were focusing on the situation in existing and well-establised universities in South Africa and elsewhere and not in a new university. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the issue of decolonisation of higher education curricula from a practical point of a new university.

In order to appreciate the significance of the struggle for decolonisation of HE, one needs to appreciate the role that education, training and innovation play in South Africa's long term development agenda as articulated in the National Development Plan (Somo, 2016). One also needs to understand how performance and success patterns in the South African higher education system are still racially skewed with African students being affected most negatively (CHE, 2013; Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2006; Dhunpath & Vithal, 2012). Viewed in this context, the decolonisation movement is thus seen as a key instrument in the reduction of inequality and the elimination of poverty not only in the higher education sector but in society at large. It is crucial that a new university engages in a deep conversation on this issue so that it develops appropriate structures,

processes and mechanisms to deal with the decolonisation imperative.

The university that is the research site of this study is one of the two universities established by the South African democratic government in 2014. It is referred to as a new university to differentiate it with the other universities that were established long back during the apartheid era. This university has a current student population of 4500 and an academic staff complement of 350. Regardless of its relative newness, it was not spared by the massive disruption that arose from the fees must fall and decolonisation protests. It is thus crucial that as a new university it engages in a critical conversation on this issue so that it develops appropriate structures, processes and mechanisms to deal with the decolonisation imperative.

This paper therefore seeks to explore the issue of decolonising the higher education curriculum, with a view to understand how a new university can possibly respond to the decolonisation imperative through the teaching and learning, assessment, curriculum development and the research process. This is important because students and other stakeholders might want to approach this issue with haste, anger and emotions. It is hoped this research will equip the university to approach the issue with care and reason in an evidence-based manner.

The next section presents a brief background to the study followed by a review of related literature, research methodology and discussion of findings and recommendations.

3 ESSENCE OF CURRICULUM

The term curriculum can be conceived from different epistemological and ontological assumptions. Jan van den Akker (2009) refers to curriculum as all the experiences that the student undergoes through while being part of that institution. Diamond (2008) has elaborated on this concept by asserting that "a curriculum is a blend of educational strategies, course content, learning outcomes, educational experiences, assessment, the educational environment and the individual students' learning style, personal timetable and the programme of work". Mgqwashu (2017) adds that the notion of curriculum involves attitudes, beliefs, dispositions and worldviews that students learn, unlearn, relearn, construct, reconstruct, deconstruct as a result of the experiences that students acquire through engagement with their programmes. Both Diamond (2008) and Mgqwashu (2017) conceptualisations of curriculum are important for this study as they are more comprehensive and cannot be reduced to mere syllabi, course outlines or the programmes of study that students are pursuing. Cornbleth (1990) ccontends that the way we conceive of curriculum and curriculum making is important because our conceptions and ways of reasoning about curriculum reflect and shape how we see, think and talk about, study and act on the education made available to our students.

4 ESSENCE OF COLONIALISM

To understand the essence of decolonisation one needs to reflect back on colonialism and what it entails. In my view this is necessary because decolonisation efforts are meant to address issues and practices that are rooted in colonialism. Colonialism entails the establishment of political, economic and cultural control over one state by another (Shamuyarira, 1965). Europe's keen interest in Africa's natural resources, which reached peak between1400 to 1800 served as the major driving force behind the colonisation of African States.

This led to the Scramble for Africa which saw many European states competing for colonies in the African continent (Mbembe, 2015). Countries such as Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal and Italy played a significant role in the colonisation process. The net effect of colonialism in Africa was the creation of African nation states which were controlled politically, economically and culturally. This in essence meant a total disruption and distortion of the traditional, political, cultural and social institutions that had developed in Africa over the years. In the process, the indigenous knowledge and educational systems of African States were severely affected. As a consequence, and as cogently pointed out by (Kamanzi, 2017) schools and universities built in the African continent were modelled along European systems, values, norms and culture. This forms the crux of the problem that this paper sought to investigate.

Although successive African governments did try to align their higher education systems, consistent with the democratic imperatives, such efforts were largely marginal and of very limited consequence as the HE system remained largely unchanged. Therefore, the decolonisation of education debate should be understood against this background. As amply demonstrated by CHE (2013) to this day, performance patterns in universities in South Africa are still heavily related to apartheid patterns where white students do well followed by Indian, coloured and African students coming last.

5 THE CONCEPT OF DECOLONISING HIGHER EDUCATION

Although colonialism is no longer in existence, its legacy continues to influence social, political economic and cultural life in the African continent (Kamanzi, 2017).

The debate on the decolonisation of education is predicated on the assumption that the current HE system is imbued with colonialist tendencies, ethos, values, practices and norms. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) refers to this as a process of epistemological decolonisation that is meant to bring epistemic freedom not only in academia but society at large. He argues further that epistemic freedom is about democratising knowledge so as to regulate the overrepresentation of Eurocentric thought in education, knowledge and social theory. This, he argues, is a pre-requisite for any successful decolonisation struggle as it gives rise to the emergence of a critical decolonial consciousness. Mgqwashu (2017) contends that decolonisation involves among other things exorcising existing educational practices, beliefs and norms of the idea that anything other than European is inferior. He further argues that this, in essence, calls for a shift in our epistemological and ontological perspectives. This among other things calls for the recognition and incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems into the HE system. For this to happen, knowledge systems including universities need to show a genuine interest in diverse cultures, peoples and languages (Kamanzi, 2017). The decolonial approach seeks to address what Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2012) refers to as the problem of coloniality of knowledge which expresses itself as an invasion of the mental universe of the colonised people of Africa.

Heleta (2016) makes a cogent observation that up to this day the South African Higher Education continues to reproduce hegemonic identities instead of eliminating them. His argument is based on the observation that the major theories that inform educational practice are largely informed by Western theories which are not

complemented by locally generated theories that are informed by life as it is lived, experienced and understood by local people. In the same vein, Mbembe (2016, p. 32) contends that there is something profoundly wrong when syllabuses designed to meet the needs of colonialism and apartheid should continue well into the liberation era. As one of its motivation for the proposal for the restructuring of the undergraduate curriculum degree structure in South African Universities, CHE (2013) noted that the present curriculum was adopted almost a century ago, during the colonial period, and has remained largely unchanged despite the major changes that have occurred in social and economic conditions. This gives credence to the argument that most of what has existed as Western Eurocentric, intellectual tradition and social science is proving irrelevant, impotent, in the analysis of African experiences (Mbembe, 2016; Alace, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). From the foregoing, one can suggest that African scholars need to reduce their scientific dependence on hegemonic Eurocentric knowledge that has become canonical in academic practice. This dependence expresses itself among other things when African scholars continue to seek confirmation and validation of their knowledge in Europe and North America in their propensity to publish in so-called international high-impact journals (Waghid, 2014). Santos (2014) therefore advocates for the departure from treating 'knowledge' as if it is canonical in preference of the 'knowledges'

Practically, the call for decolonisation of the curriculum should not be misconstrued as a discouragement to learn from the West and the rest of the world. Rather, it should concern itself with the recognition of various forms of knowledge and knowing. (Kamanzi, 2017). As Letseka (2014, p. 14) maintains that "decolonisation should concern itself with making higher education relevant to the material, historical and social realities of the communities in which universities operate". This view resonates well with Mbembe (2015) research on decolonising the curriculum in African universities where he argued that locally theorised knowledge from Africa should be brought into dialogue with knowledge from other continents and the process of knowledge generation and dissemination, should reflect African norms, practices and beliefs. This is important as it helps address what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) refers to as the problem of epistemic hegemony that characterises the present higher education system in South Africa.

Pillay (2015) extends on this idea by asserting that decolonisation of higher education is about justice that addresses the epistemic violence of colonial knowledge and colonial thought. The same author remarks that many students including academics and leaders in higher education still believe that Western knowledge systems constitute the only basis of higher forms of thinking. The epistemological transformation also depends on the significant increase of black, coloured and Indian academics at Universities (HESA, 2014). However, we should not lose sight of Maserumule's (2015) caution that the replacement of white academics and leaders by African leaders while necessary is not a sufficient condition for the attainment of a decolonised curriculum since many of these African academics and leaders who were schooled largely in the Eurocentric tradition may find it difficult to renounce their very identity. This calls for what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) refers to as the need to shift the geography and biography of knowledge, as the knowledge that has led Africa to its current state of epistemic crises cannot serve as the emancipatory tool to extricate Africa from that crises. In this vein Alace (2016) is spot

on when he suggests that African academics need to rethink thinking as well as learning to unlearn in order to relearn.

6 THEORETICAL LENS

This study is informed by the cultural hegemony theory which Gramsci, in Apple (2010) regards as a phenomenon that refers to the ways in which assumptions of a group achieve dominance over another and are considered as common sense understandings. It entails the dominance of one group over other groups without the threat of force. This argument has it that consent to the rule of dominant is achieved through the spread of dominant worldviews, beliefs assumptions, and values through social institutions such as the education system, media, family, religion and politics. These institutions socialise people in terms of the beliefs, norms and values of the dominant social group.

Cultural hegemony is perpetuated when those ruled by the dominant group come to believe that their social conditions are natural and inevitable rather than created by people who have a vested interest in particular social, economic and political orders (Pitsoe & Dichaba, 2013). The power of consent is therefore seen as key to the maintenance of the hegemonic status quo. Thus, Gramsci regards the educational system as one of the central elements of cultural hegemony that spreads an ideology that helps reproduce the existing unequal social structure.

The South African higher education curriculum or knowledge system is hegemonic because it is imbued with European values, views, assumptions, practices and ways of knowing which negates African and indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing. European values, have over time come to be regarded as universal and necessary as most teaching, learning and research practices are validated through Western logic at the expense of African or indigenous rationality (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 2012). This has resulted in the subjugation and subordination of African students' interests to colonial interests. This alienation is often cited as contributing to the current unsatisfactory performance patterns of African students in HE as compared to students from other racial groups. Universities should therefore start the process of rethinking thinking as well as relearning so as to address the problem of epistemic crises that currently exists in HE Santos (2014).

7 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives of this study were to:

- Examine academics understanding of what it means to decolonise higher education
- Highlight possible approaches that universities can take to decolonise higher education
- Analyse the various roles that university stakeholders can play to decolonise higher education

8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was guided by the following research questions

- What does decolonising higher education mean to academics?
- What approaches can universities take to decolonise higher education?
- How can university internal stakeholders assist in decolonising higher education?

9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a qualitative research methodology which enabled the researcher and the researched to co-construct the data through the generation of multiple subjective realities (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The use of open-ended questions was key to the generation of rich descriptive data which forms the mainstay of qualitative research.

10 SAMPLE.

The sample for this study comprises 10 black senior academics, five from each gender, from the level of senior lecturer up to professor, who were purposively selected to participate in the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique in which the researcher uses his/her judgement to select participants which she/he feels will give accurate information (Creswell, 2009). It involves choosing the people whom the researcher feels are well equipped with information that will be relevant to the focus of the study (Creswell, 2009). Black senior academics were therefore preferred in this study since they were not only considered relevant for the theme of the study, but also experienced and competent enough to provide information-rich and substantiated responses on the issue of decolonisation.

11 INSTRUMENTATION AND PROCEDURES

Data were collected through an unstructured interview guide. Structured interviews were selected since they would enable the researcher to interact freely with the participants in order to get a deep sense of their understanding of decolonisation. In the process, meaningful and information-rich data will be generated (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The interview questions centred on the issue of academics understanding of the concept of decolonisation and how university stakeholders can help decolonise the higher education curriculum through the teaching and learning, curriculum development, assessment and research process. Interviews were conducted at times agreed between the researcher and the participants during normal working hours throughout the whole month of April 2018. Each interview session lasted between 30 to 40 minutes.

12 DATA ANALYSIS

The thematic analysis approach was used in the analysis of data. This model requires the researcher to become familiar with the data, develop codes, identify, define and review themes (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Data were also analysed using verbatim statements from the respondents.

13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

First, permission to conduct research was sought and granted by the institution's research ethics committee. Prior to the interviews, the researcher clarified the purpose of the research and reassured the participants of their rights to anonymity and confidentiality as well as the freedom to withdraw from the research process any time they felt so. Fortunately, none of the participants withdrew from the study. Acceptance to participate in the study was confirmed by the completion of acceptance and consent forms.

14 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results for this research were presented and discussed under the five themes that emerged from the unstructured interviews with the participants as follows: The meaning of decolonisation; approaches

to decolonisation; role of stakeholders in decolonising higher education; decolonising the curriculum through teaching and learning; decolonising the curriculum through research and knowledge generation process. Verbatim statements from participants were also used as major organising principles.

The meaning of decolonisation.

Participants were generally unanimous that decolonisation entails doing away with aspects of colonialism that is embedded in the curriculum or processes of teaching and learning. The participants described the present higher education as being Eurocentric which necessitates the decolonisation process. The following responses were apt:

Respondent 1: *Historically higher education in the colonial world was configured according to the prescriptions of the coloniser. This has tended to continue in those countries well after they attained independence.*

Respondent 2: *It is a deliberate effort of teaching of content and practices that abhor and are at variance with colonialism and apartheid. Such effort focuses on revising the curriculum by removing content and pholosophies that glorify colonialism.*

A running thread across many responses was that the existing higher education system had some remnants of colonialism or was completely entrapped in it.

Respondent 3: *decolonisation is the removal of foreign aspects in the curriculum of HE and replacing it with indigenous elements to portray the culture of locals.*

The incorporation of indigenous knowledge into the curriculum also emerged from participant responses as a necessary ingredient of a decolonised education system. What respondents said linked well with Santos (2014) assertion that epistemological decolonisation seeks to redress issues of epistemicides, linguicides, culturalcides and alienation which were attendant to colonialism. As Magqwashu (2017) cogently puts it, locally theorised knowledge from Africa should be brought into dialogue with knowledge from other continents. He goes on to add that the process of knowledge generation and dissemination should reflect African norms, practices and beliefs. It is therefore important to point out that the call for decolonisation of the curriculum is not a call for the rejection of knowledge from the Western world. Rather, it is a call to make university education relevant to the material, historical and social realities of the local communities in which universities are located.

Approaches to decolonisation

It emerged from the study that the task of decolonising the HE system will not be easy nor linear. It calls for an eclectic approach that requires the participation of many stakeholders both internal and external to the university. While students and academics will exercise great agency in the decolonisation campaign, they obviously cannot go it alone as they also need the support of external stakeholders such government, alumni, funders, community and others. This study established that in order to succeed in their roles as agents of decolonisation academics and executive management need to acquire the right orientation and consciousness. An Afrocentric perspective is therefore key in this regard. This is consistent with Maserumule (2015) observation that many of the old academics and leaders were schooled in the colonial tradition and as such they may be reluctant to disclaim their identity.

Universities the world over have often earned the criticism of being too conservative thereby casting doubt over their capacity to initiate and execute the decolonisation campaign to its logical conclusion. This resonates well with Apple (2010) assertion that the intellectuals of society cannot act as the vanguard of the interests of the ordinary working class values, interests and aspirations as they are actually embedded in a privileged social class where they enjoy prestige in society. One respondent echoed the following in this regards:

Respondent 6: *Decolonisation calls for revolutionary and progressive academics, those that have declared a de-taste for apartheid and colonialism and all that it stands for. An academic whose writing has exposed the evils of apartheid and one who associates with the suffering majority. You cannot expect an academic that is complicit to map such an agenda. The responsibility may also be extended to organisations and international scholars with an impeccable record of fighting oppression and colonialism.*

Most participants located the agency to decolonise higher education within both internal and external university stakeholders such as students, academics, leaders in higher education and other stakeholders. For instance, two respondents gave the following responses:

Respondent 7: Government, universities, funders, teachers, students, civil society and industry should take part in the decolonisation process.

Respondent 8: All curriculum stakeholders including students, lecturers, subject specialist, curriculum developers, department of education officials, university administrators should be involved.

It is clear from the above responses that the decolonisation process will require an inclusive approach if it is to succeed.

Role of university internal stakeholders in decolonising Higher Education

Under this broad theme data were further categorised into three sub-themes that emerged namely, students, academics and university management as internal university stakeholders. Data was presented in terms of how in the eyes of the participants each category can exercise agency in the decolonisation of higher education process.

Students

The involvement of students was seen by many participants as critical in the decolonisation process. This did not come as a surprise given the fact that the decolonisation debate, which had become dormant for quite some time in the South African Higher education sector, was brought to the fore by students' acts of activism during the 2015/2016 academic year. However, respondents emphasised that students need to be pragmatic and evidence-based in their approach to decolonisation rather than being emotional and ideological. The need for public debates and conversations on decoloniality was therefore proposed as one way of promoting student awareness and understanding on the issue.

Academics

All the 10 participants in this study indicated the central role that academics should play in the decolonisation process. Most of them identified two processes in which academics can exercise agency in the decolonisation process. The most important one involves the revision of the curriculum followed by academics' teaching approaches. The following responses from selected participants further substantiate the point:

Responded 1: *Academics can assist in the decolonisation process through revising the curriculum and the teaching approaches they use.*

Respondent 2: *Academics must revise the curriculum. Content must be aligned to a people's present, past and future aspirations and history.*

Elaborating on the teaching approach as a strategy to influence the decolonisation process, one respondent indicated that student centred teaching methodologies that are informed by the constructivist and humanist perspectives play a major role in the decolonisation process. Three participants indicated that methods that promote critical thinking and problem solving skills are more useful in ridding the higher education system of the colonial aspects. Five participants underlined how academics can influence the decolonisation process through their approaches and practice of research. To sum up, participants indicated that academics can assist in the decolonisation campaign through the revision of the existing curriculum, teaching approaches and their approach to research.

Executive management

Many participants felt that executive management can contribute to the decolonisation of university knowledge at the level of policy making and implementation. There was also an indication that executive management can assist in the decolonisation process by creating enabling environments and platforms for academics to debate issues on decolonisation, re-orienting academics' paradigms through staff development workshops, seminars and "indabas". The appointment of renowned African scholars was also brought to the fore. However, three participants raised a critical concern that it cannot be taken for granted that executive management will certainly act in the desired way by the mere fact that they belong to executive management. These participants underlined the possession of the right orientation and consciousness as catalytic requirements in the decolonisation process. Following from this view one participant remarked as follows:

Participant 4: *…. but executive management need to cleanse themselves of the knowledge forms and practices that are known by society of sustaining or glorify apartheid and colonialism.*

This calls for what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) refers to as a need for re-education to align distortions caused by centuries of miseducation while Santos (2014) calls it a process of learning to unlearn in order to relearn. In sum, the need for an inclusive approach to decolonising HE was underlined.

Decolonising the curriculum through teaching and learning.

On how to initiate decolonisation through the teaching and learning process, participants were unanimous that what was needed first was the revision of the curriculum or some form of reform. This was followed by the need to change teaching practices, approaches and facilitation styles. On curriculum reform participants highlighted that this can be done by integrating indigenous knowledge system into the curriculum. It came out that selection of curriculum content should also be informed by the need to include content that promote African ideals. A running thread throughout the responses was that the existing university curriculum is largely disconnected from the majority of the African students, which creates a state of alienation in their learning. This is probably one reason why African students do not perform well as compared to students from

other racial backgrounds. One participants responded as follows:

Participant 4: *The curriculum needs revision. Changing the aims, objectives, content, teaching practices and assessment strategies of the curriculum that is known to aid apartheid or colonialism is key.*

Participant 6: *One approach to decolonisation is* by integrating African knowledge into the curriculum; by letting students look at things from Afrocentric perspectives. *A lot of African oriented technologies and knowledge should be incorporated in the curriculum. Quality assurance systems should monitor and evaluate the incorporation of indigenous knowledge system in the curriculum.*

The above sentiments resonate well with the South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2013) report on the existing three and four-year undergraduate curriculum structure. In the report the CHE raised an important observation that the present curriculum was adopted almost a century ago, during the colonial period, and has remained largely unchanged despite the major changes that have occurred in social and economic conditions of many students. Since this type of curriculum is not in the best interests of many African students, it is strongly believed that this could be one reason why most African students are not succeeding in their studies in higher education as compared to students from other ethnic backgrounds. Consequently, a flexible curriculum structure was therefore proposed.

When asked to describe the teaching approaches that would be needed, most respondents said that these should promote situated learning and Afrocentric perspectives. Elaborating on this point one respondent said this can be done by way of using local examples and content derived from the African context. Practical and research oriented teaching as well as problem based learning approaches were cited as key in decolonising education. The following quotes may serve to illustrate the point:

Respondent 9: *When teaching or demonstrating concepts use examples or readings from the cultural or African origin. When responding to questions students should be encouraged to give examples for their answers from the local and cultural aspects. Furthermore, students should be assessed on information which is integrated with Afrocentric issues, where they are asked to compare and contrast knowledge systems from different contexts including the African one.*

The need for student-centred, constructivist-inclined teaching approaches that foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills should therefore be at the centre of university teaching.

Decolonising the curriculum through the research and knowledge generation process?

With regards to the role of research in the decolonisation of knowledge, participants underlined the need for a paradigm shift in the practice of research in universities. There was a general feeling that research that is conducted in universities should foreground issues that are at the heart of African culture, values and development. These views link well with Pillay (2015) advice that one way of addressing the injustice of epistemic violence that has been at the centre of colonial education is incorporating African worldviews in research. This will signify a significant departure from the current HE curriculum which is largely disconnected from the realities of Africans including the lived experience of the black South Africans (Le Grange, 2016).

Another major finding on this issue was that universities should prioritise indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) as a niche area in their research agendas. Respondents felt that IKS as a field of study is currently under researched and less documented. There was a feeling that students should engage in more action research than is currently the case. The following statements were typical:

Participant 1: *Academics should engage in cutting-edge research about the needs of post-colonial states. They should also contribute in writing the literature which students use in their learning. Academics must collaborate with other African scholars from different African countries, by publishing in African journals, by publishing in African content in reputable journals.*

Respondent 2: *Academics can assist by re-writing history books. Academics need to popularise a people-oriented narrative and not one that is peddled by sympathisers of colonial and apartheid education.*

The above views find expression in Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2012) sentiment that university research, teaching and learning should be grounded in the African archives. In the same vein Chilisa (2012) indicated that mainstream research conducted in African societies must not ignore African ways of knowing and knowledge systems. He goes on to argue that epistemic freedom can only be achieved if research methodologies are decolonised and indigenised. This among other things implies that research methodologies be embedded in the experiences, value systems and histories of the African people.

Taken together, findings from the literature and the responses from the participants clearly suggest that the need for decolonising higher education curriculum is not a mere academic debate but a real issue that should be attended to with a heightened sense of urgency and pragmatism by all those concerned.

15 CONCLUSION

The decolonisation of higher education campaign has gained a new sense of urgency given the important role that higher education plays in individual and social development as well as the elimination of poverty and social inequality. The campaign is predicated on the need to align HE with the diverse needs of students from different social, political and economic backgrounds. The notion of decolonisation can no longer be restricted to the mere removal of colonial aspects imposed on the curriculum but should be up-scaled to include the dismantling of what we may have constructed post-colonialism, but which does not align with local imperatives. In other words, the call for decolonisation of the curriculum should not be misconstrued as a discouragement to learn from the West and the rest of the world but a call to make the university curriculum and knowledge as inclusive as is desirable. The use of Afrocentric-compliant pedagogies as well as the conceptualisation and implementation of cutting-edge research driven by African epistemological systems remain key to the decolonisation of the university curriculum in South Africa and beyond. All progressive forces including students, academics, the public and the government need to rally behind the campaign and engage with each other in a non-violent, non-emotional and intellectually motivated approach.

16 RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the findings of this study, it is recommended that academics,

academic leaders and students in universities continue to engage on the issue of decolonisation of university education as well as knowledge systems. In the current era of the COVID 19 and the subsequent national lockdown, these engagements can be conducted through properly planned webinars facilitated by prominent authorities in the field of educational planning and curriculum design.

Engagements and debates involving decolonisation of education should not only be confined to Higher Education practitioners and institutions. Instead, such debates need to be activated even at the level of basic education involving teachers, institutional heads and students. This is important because most of the teaching and learning concerns and problems that are experienced by students and lecturers at university are rooted in primary and secondary education level. Therefore, instigating conversations at this level might be a more holistic way of understanding the issue of decolonisation of education than is currently the case.

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