Insights on the Relevance of Decolonised Education in African Higher Education Institutions and Challenges Posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

It is incontrovertible that most African higher education institutions (HEIs) strive for the decolonisation of education in its teaching, learning and research practices. This is envisaged as a transformative shift from the historical colonial cantered education, in Africa, to a type of education that drives and promotes African-centred epistemologies and practices. Hence, the demand for decolonised higher education is glaring in most African universities, prompting the authors of this paper to focus on this area. Qualitative in nature, this paper is located within the interpretivist research design. The population was all educators at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) Extracted from telephonic data, collected from NUL, this paper analysed the insights of 14 educators regarding the decolonisation of African higher education. Results revealed that 11 of the educators were enthusiastic about decolonisation while three were against it. Definitions of decolonisation of higher education subscribed by the educators were centred on detaching from Western paradigms and rely on local pedagogical practices and content. Challenges imposed by COVID-19 relate to failure to practice drama and community engagements. Findings regarding decolonisation issues are envisaged to shape the debates on decolonisation of education in HEIs and its relevance to remote learning. Results on challenges impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to this novel endeavour assist in paving the way forward so as to ensure that decolonisation of higher education cannot be negatively hampered by the pandemic. The study recommends that the decolonisation process should not be motivated by an intrinsic abhorrence of the colonial past since it may lead to compromising of university standards; rather it should be based on the need to uplift the education system thereby ensuring quality education.

Key words: decolonisation, higher education institutions, indigenous knowledge, COVID-19, transformation.

INTRODUCTION

This section looks at the definition of decolonisation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the background of the decolonisation of HEIs, the background of COVID-19 and the importance of decolonisation of HEIs.

What is Decolonisation of Higher Education Institutions?

Various definitions of decolonisation of higher education institutions abound[1]. This indicates that there are numerous dissenting voices advocating divergent pathways for the

decolonisation project. In defining decolonisation of higher education, Garuba (2015) focuses on the curriculum and therefore explains that the first approach is to augment new items to the existing curriculum. However, one can argue that this approach is endorsed by those who endeavour to uphold the status quo. The second approach suggested by Giruba (2015) is that of rethinking how the content to be studied is constituted and then restructured to bring about critical modifications. Thus, when deliberating on decolonisation and reconceptualisation of curriculum issues in Africa, there is need to contemplate on the two methodologies put forward by Giruba.

> Most scholars link decolonisation of education with isolation from Western ideas.

However, Mbembe (2016, p. 35) clarifies that decolonisation is about clearly defining 'what the centre is.' In this regard, Africa should be located at the centre. This seems accurate given that, since colonisation, Africans have been aligned with the imperialists' curriculum, placing it at the forefront. Mbele (2019) is straightforward; pointing out that the project of decolonisation denotes the thorough eradication of the colony, its equipment, vehicle and leftovers. This is a tough stance as compared to the one suggested by Giruba. Adding their voice on this matter; Stein and Andreotti (2016) elaborate that decolonisation can be largely understood as an umbrella term for varied ways to reject the significant but complex processes of racialisation and colonisation.

Background of Decolonisation of Higher Education Institutions

The need to decolonise HEIs came to being upon realising that colonial education

endorsed and enforced the Eurocentric ideas among Africans and in the same vein supressed anything else African. Thus, one of the most destructive effects of colonialism was the subjugation of local knowledge and promotion of the Western knowledge as the supreme knowledge. Most African universities have not substantially transformed; hence, they continue to be grounded in colonial and Western epistemological traditions. By so doing, the colonialists have effectively instilled an inferiority complex in the Africans and this complex is currently ingrained in their minds. This explains why Said (1994:8) clarifies that Western European literature has for centuries portrayed the non-Western realm and people as mediocre and subsidiary. By so doing, it helped to authenticate colonialism and to ensure its long-term sustainability[2]. In a way, this was an attempt to suppressing a revolt by painting a gory image of what needed to be changed.

Colonial universities were glaringly Eurocentric, founded on the metropolitan universities from which they 'drew much of their faculty and curricular' (Zeleza, 2009, p. 114). This demonstrates that the issue of decolonising social and natural sciences in universities has been part of southern discourses for several decades (Ake, 1979; Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Chabal, 2012). It also reveals that Africa has a long history of actions of negation to colonial education and trying to attain curriculum transformation in particular (Motsa, 2017). Chile also offers a relevant example, where student uprisings forced a nationwide discussion on the fundamental obstacles within the Chilean education structure. Williams (2015) observes that the Chileans' call to end profit making in education, resulted in noteworthy educational reforms and reconsiderations of the connections between the education

system and the social and economic inequalities in Chile.

Another example is that reported by Filho and Collins (1998) of the student protests that ascended in Brazil between 1962 and the 1990s which gradually turned into struggles to transform the state and economy, ultimately contributing to the country's democratic transitions during the 1990s. This was an awakening call to Brazilian students during that period. The effectiveness of these student movements revoked the academic debates in the region, motivating ideas of a decolonial wake, which has been articulated in terms of transmuting how to approach certain issues, as well as second wave of decolonisation (Mignolo, 2009; Maldonado-Torres, 2011).

In South Africa, numerous curriculum reforms have been instigated since the 1990s and the policy goals formed during those years appeared to be overambitious. Truly so, as Lange (2017) notes, nothing substantial was modified in relation to the curriculum, for instance, methods of teaching, material to be taught and evaluation methods (Lange, 2017). Soon after the events of 2015, the decolonisation debate intensified and academic contributions continued to make demands about the abolishment of epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South African higher education, as exhibited by the works of Walker (2018), Webbstock (2017), Fumunyam (2017a, 2017b), Heleta (2016) and Le Grange (2016). In response to this, the protesting students called for a decolonised curriculum in order to end what they regarded to be epistemic violence, through eradicating "the heterosexual, patriarchal, neoliberal capitalist values which have become so characteristic of the country's universities" (Le Grange, 2016, p. 2).

Molefe (2016:32) expounds that around 2015, South African students,

together with a few progressive academics initiated a campaign to decolonise the higher education curriculum by bringing to an end, the domination of Western epistemological civilisations, pasts and records. It is imperative that the struggle continues taking its thrust given that Mbele (2019) cited that Africa now faces a new threat of Chinese colonisation. This clearly shows that the foreign agenda of colonising Africa is still ongoing. In this regard, it has simply been altered by assuming an Asian narrative. Thus, Africa needs to be on its guard, protecting its legacy and future. In Lesotho, the National University of Lesotho was founded by settler elites who viewed it as an emblem and transmitter of European civilisation in the Southern African colonies.

Background of COVID-19

The background of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) stretches back to December 2019 where it was first detected in Wuhan in China. It is now a pandemic that many countries globally are now grappling with. The COVID-19 pandemic, is a continuing pandemic caused by acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) WHO (2020a). The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January, and a pandemic on 11 March. COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease and over a million cases have been diagnosed globally. This has led to the closure of schools and universities, the National University of Lesotho included.

The importance of Decolonisation of Higher Education Institutions

The reason why African students embarked on protests demanding decolonisation of higher education was largely because they yearned for the

advantages associated with it. This has led many to emphasise the importance of decolonising the brain (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). This was a reasonable plan given that Africans had been brainwashed, hence new ideas had to be instilled in their minds for fresh mind-sets. Apart from that, these students were in pursuit of cognitive justice in higher education research and curricula (Sousa Santos, 2007). One other importance of the decolonisation of higher education cited by Mbele (2019) is that it has also fashioned a protracted resistance tradition of any group on earth, whose inspiration is tangible in the modern opposition struggles and projects, and has directly stimulated the advent of a novel generation of activists, majority of them being young black women, who are currently challenging old patriarchal, political and gender-stereotyped conducts of activism.

In explaining why decolonising knowledge is important and indispensable, Mignolo (2007) elucidates that decolonisation and decoloniality are about operating in the course of an idea of human civilisation which is not reliant upon or structured by the imposition of one model of society against those parallel to it, which in this case is colonialism, hence, that is where decolonisation of the mind ought to commence. In addition to this, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) asserts that what decoloniality fundamentally addresses are the coloniality of knowledge, the colonialism of power and being. These areas of coloniality jointly strengthen each other and collectively produce the practice of colonialism.

One more advantage of decolonisation of higher education pointed out by (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) is that it tries to alter the location of reason away from the West, toward previously colonised epistemic sites in order to increase the legality or validity of what (Grosfoguel, 2007:213) terms "subaltern epistemic perspectives." In the same vein, Mignolo (2007) asserts that epistemic decolonisation "is necessary to make possible and move toward a truly intercultural communication; to an exchange of experiences and significations as the foundation of rationality" (Mignolo, 2007, p. 499).

Practical and specific instances of what epistemic decolonisation may involve comprise the arguments by Le Grange (2016) who champion for a curriculum founded on the philosophy of Ubuntu, distancing from views such as 'I think therefore I am' to 'I am because we are.' In this case, students are taught about togetherness and compassion, not selfishness and egocentricity. Stein and Andreotti (2016) add that these movements contested the shaping of racialised and indigenous people as objects of knowledge as well as searching for institutional recognition and support of themselves as subjects of knowledge. On the same vein, Ferguson (2012) observes that such movements did not have all their demands fulfilled, but to a greater extent, attained the institutionalisation of ethnic and women's studies programmes, as well as the creation of student cultural centres and culturally specific programming in universities. It is vital to note that currently, many of these centres, departments, programs, and institutes are finding it difficult to acquire adequate funds to run their decolonisation ventures.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The decolonisation of higher education discourse has placed a lot of focus on the manner in which higher education practices have always been influenced by various assumptions that are aligned to certain epistemological paradigms. The decolonisation of higher education debate has

also lay bare criticisms regarding the content taught in HEIs as well as pedagogic methods. Morreira (2017) also observed that tertiary students are not content with the curricular being utilised currently in higher education institutions. This paper therefore examines educators' perceptions on the meaning of decolonisation of higher education and how it should be implemented. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has had debilitating impacts on teaching and learning, inclusive of decolonisation of higher education endeavours. Therefore, challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic were looked at with the aim of forging a way forward so that decolonisation of higher education cannot be compromised by the pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach. A qualitative method was chosen because of its ability to capture the richness and diversity of the ways in which research participants ascribe and construct meaning. The research design adopted was a case study, using the case of the National University of Lesotho. Case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Yin, 2009). Case studies are bounded by time and action and researchers gather detailed information using an assortment of data collection procedures, spread over a period of time (Yin, 2012, 2009; Stake, 1995). Qualitative in nature, this study is founded within the interpretivist paradigm. Hammersley (2013) holds that the interpretivist paradigm generates knowledge based on participants' interpretations of their world and the researcher discusses findings based on such interpretations. Thus, the researcher gets the participants' meanings through their interpretations of things around them. This paradigm was chosen therefore for its ability to generate thick descriptions of decolonisation issues from the NUL lecturers.

A total of 14 lecturers were purposively selected for this study. The eligibility criteria included the following: being a lecturer employed by NUL[3], having been a lecturer at a university for at least five years, having indicated that he or she is familiar with decolonisation of HEIs issues. In this regard, participants were selected because they had indicated that they were familiar with decolonisation of HEIs issues and they had been working as lecturers for a considerable amount of time, at least three years, making them capable of generating useful data for the study. University lecturers were deemed appropriate targets because Webbstock (2017), Jansen (2017a) and Heleta (2018) observed that lecturers are an essential part of the exercise to decolonise curriculum. These lecturers deal with curriculum issues year in and year out. All faculties[4] were of interest since practically all faculties have their different curricular. Data were collected utilising interview guides. The in-depth interviews were conducted over the phone in order to guard against COVID-19. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse qualitative data and the major themes that came out were conceptualisation of decolonisation of the HEIs curriculum, implementation of decolonised curriculum and challenges caused by COVID-19.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Even though this study acknowledges that decolonisation of HEIs is a broad concept which entails some of the following: withdrawal of colonial names, removal of statues and symbols, curricula

transformation, overhauling of tertiary education funding models and enhancing insourcing of workforce by tertiary institutions, not all of these indicators of decolonisation were employed by this study. Thus, the insights of educators in HEIs into the decolonisation of higher education were looked at in terms of how NUL lecturers conceptualise decolonisation of HEIs and their applications of decolonisation principles to teaching and learning. Thus, this study focused on curriculum issues. Apart from definitions of HEIs, focus was also placed on NUL lecturers' perceptions about how the colonial curriculum should be transformed. Lastly, the discussion will zero on challenges related to decolonisation of HEIs amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

A total of 14 lecturers participated in the study; of which, nine were males while five were females. They were selected across the various NUL faculties using purposive sampling, based on their prior knowledge about decolonisation. All faculties were included bearing in mind that decolonisation of the curriculum is not necessarily a matter of interest to specific faculties but for the whole university. With regard to their biography, some of them earned their postgraduate certificates from South African universities; hence, they either experienced apartheid and/or the aftermath of apartheid first-hand.

Meanings of decolonising of Higher Education

A key theme emerging from the analysis is the conceptualisation of decolonising the curriculum. The lecturers had various meanings they attached to decolonisation of the curriculum. Their understanding of this issue was influenced by, among other things, their ages, background, gender, interests, areas of expertise, and conviction regarding colonialism. Out of the 14 lecturers, seven males and four female lecturers favoured decolonisation of the curricular and two males and one female were against it. With regard to age, 11 lecturers above the age of 40 favoured decolonisation while three who were below the age of 35 did not favour decolonisation. Some definitions articulated by lecturers show a clear resentment of the colonial curriculum. In particular, participant five had this to say on her understanding of decolonisation of HEIs:

> For me, decolonisation of HEIs entails the end of domination by whites and Western methods of learning. Hence, a transformed curriculum must be totally different from the old one (Participant five, April, 2020).

Participant five calls for a radical change in curriculum to a new one that is totally divorced from the colonial era so as to set the boundaries for a new era. This particular view seems to be informed by a very strong conviction that any continuation of the Western ways of operation in local HEIs would not have any semblance of change – but rather a perpetuation of the past. Hence, participant five may be justified to view decolonisation in that manner. In contrast, Shay (2016) submits that decolonisation of HEIs has to be a mixture of European paradigms in higher education and incorporation of other South African, African and global perspectives and epistemologies. Thus, Shay (2016) argues for an inclusive approach; which avoids a total discontinuity from the past, hence avoid throwing away those valuable aspects from the colonial era that enhances local communities without conflicting or degrading their indigenous knowledge, cultural and value systems.

As for participants nine and fourteen, the meaning of decolonisation lies in placing a lot of importance in the African continent.

As an African, I view a decolonised curriculum as one that puts its attention on Africa. Are you not surprised that our own children hardly know anything about Africa? For example, with the influx of Chinese into this country now, I can tell you some university students here even think China is closer to Lesotho than Mozambique, Tanzania, DRC, etc. It shows something is just wrong with our curriculum (Participant nine, May, 2020).

This thing about restructuring of the curriculum after colonisation refers to taking Africa as the reference point; meaning we have to consider African issues first before any other issues. I doubt if this cry by some politicians, of a United States of Africa, will ever see light of day if our education remains un-decolonised. I wish I would live forever to be proven wrong (Participant fourteen, May, 2020).

These two participants strongly believe that decolonisation of curriculum and reviewing the Pan-Africanism philosophy is very important to Africans and for driving the African agenda. They advocate for leaving behind Western ways and look for answers within the African continent, and believe a radical review of the curriculum might be an important starting point. This suggests that the reliance on curriculum designed by the West brews a dependence syndrome, which Africa will never be able to shake off if it continues on that path; and more over Africa may never be a united continent like other continents. The views of these participants resonates with Dreyer (2017) who opined that decolonisation of higher education calls for a need to challenge and unsettle dominant western knowledge systems so as to drive towards epistemic justice.

The issue of focusing on the content to be taught to students was highlighted by participant two.

Content matters a lot. lt matters to me to continue seeing a European-centred curriculum being central, and being used to define what is considered as crucial knowledge in Lesotho. This is bad (Participant two, April, 2020).

The participant perceives content to be of great importance and holds the view that current educational content continues to be Eurocentric, which the participant deems problematic, especially after the political "decolonisation" of Lesotho, or African countries in general. Participant two prefers Sesotho content to replace Western content. Participant two agrees with all other participants cited above, however the researchers are more inclined towards Shay's earlier articulate submission (Shay 2016); and also holds the view that any changes need to be implemented if research proves anticipated outcomes that put local communities and Africa in a better socio-economic position will be attained. Again, the implementation must be subject to the availability of knowledge systems that advantageously replace those Western aspects deemed unfavourable. A wholesale change, for the sake of change or for the sake of wishing away a people's past associated with a particular unpleasant era might create some serious challenges.

Some of the participants look at decolonisation of higher education (HE) in terms of sources of material to be utilised for the courses taught in universities and other tertiary institutions. For instance, participant six highlighted issues to do with how course outlines should be designed:

I get very much disturbed to see course outlines that indicate that students need

to get their material from books written by Western authors only and yet we have books and research articles written or authored by Africans. Africans have written books in all fields, be it in the sciences or social sciences. Why not use books by African authors? In fact, those books by Western authors tend to be more expensive. As a result, our institutions don't even afford to stock copies in the libraries; not to mention our poor students. So, what do we want to achieve by promoting books that we can't even afford? (Participant six, April, 2020).

Participant six therefore defines decolonisation of the curriculum in terms of sources of material used to teach students. If the material or sources are foreign, then there is no decolonisation to talk about. This finding resonates with what Sayed, Motala and Hoffman (2017) observed that when lecturers put a strong weight on authors based at South African institutions, it indicates that decolonisation is now at work. Thus, modifying of course outlines; and replacing Western material with African material is one way of implementing decolonisation principles by lecturers at HEIs.

Another definition provided by another participant has to do with students being allowed to make a contribution in what they are going to be taught in a given course or programme:

I define decolonisation of our HE system in terms of the amount of freedom given to students to have an input in the material being taught. If lecturers decide everything for the students, to me it is still the colonial system in place. You know; it is not in our culture to dictate to adults (Participant eleven, May, 2020).

Fataar (2018) observed that during the university students' protests in South Africa in 2016, university students suggested a complete overhaul of the curriculum. Participant eleven advocates for students' input in curriculum design. While this can indicate a change from the colonial system, one can argue that students might misuse that freedom or responsibility; for instance, by suggesting topics that are not challenging so that they may easily excel in their studies. Again, this proposal seems to suggest that students in HEIs, by virtue of being adults, are automatically aware of what other key stakeholders, like industry, expect a graduate to know when one leaves the institution. It is the researchers' view that such kind of assumptions cannot be sustained because while institutions are better placed to consult the key stakeholders and get a feel of their needs and expectations, certainly students are not in a position to do that – so their contributions might not be founded on some rational and informed basis.

While the world is driving towards a technologically driven education system, one participant surprisingly dismissed the use of technology. The participant asserted that his definition of a decolonised pedagogy is delivering of lectures utilising the African viewpoints and methods:

A decolonised curriculum is the one that does not imitate the Western methods, disregarding our own ways of teaching students. For instance, the use of technology for me has more disadvantages than advantages and it distracts students (Participant one, April, 2020).

Even though the use of technology in teaching is fraught with challenges, doing away with technology completely might be too extreme a measure in defining decolonising HEIs. Currently, lecturers are

relying on technology to deliver their lectures to students to alleviate the impacts of the current closure of all educational institutions in Lesotho, and many other countries globally, occasioned by the marauding COVID-19 scourge. Participant one pointed out that decolonisation should not be compromised, hence, it is better for universities to remain closed until the COVID-19 pandemic is over. Suffice to say, the researchers were really taken aback by participant one's view of decolonisation of HE. In fact, the researchers hold a strong view that COVID-19 has brought to the fore the need for enhanced use of technology in education across the world. Contrary to the participants' views, Nyoni (2019) emphasises that when championing for the decolonial curriculum reform, African scholars ought not to bank on the mentally embedded conception of caged colonial mentality which places little importance on the multidimensional seismic modifications that weigh heavily on the social and political educational experiences of post-colonial African Beings.

Some of the participants define decolonisation of HEIs through the medium of communication employed by the institutions:

> As long as we still have African universities that allow the use of English as the official language; we cannot talk about decolonised HEIs. The same applies to some South African universities that prefer using Afrikaans; it shows the colonial system is still in place (Participant one, May, 2020).

> I describe decolonisation of higher education (HE) curriculum by its provision to use Sesotho as a medium of teaching and learning (Participant thirteen, April, 2020).

Those that are for the use of the local languages argue that students understand material better in their local language. They also associate officialising local languages at universities with a complete break from the colonial educational system. The use of English in this regard signifies a colonial mentality. However, it should be noted that universities are international institutions which incorporate diversity through enrolling international students and employ foreign lecturers.[i] The use of local languages will therefore disadvantage these foreign students and lecturers. More so, if such endeavours were to be implemented without careful considerations, there would be a danger of some very small countries, like Lesotho, finding itself isolated from the rest of the world due to language barrier. Morreira et al. (2020) highlight that there is need to conduct research focusing on those that are continuously excluded from knowledge production.

For participant four, African knowledge systems are more important than Western ones; hence, there is need to do away with Westernised knowledge:

> My understanding of a decolonised curriculum is to completely remove the Western perspective from the curriculum and then resort to our own African indigenous knowledge systems (Participant four, April, 2020).

These views are contrary to the findings established by Newfield and Bryne (2018). Using the South African Poetry Project as a case study, Newfield and Bryne (2018) observed that scraping of English could not materialise since the project was rooted in the discipline of English. For participant four, the focus is on the indigenous perspectives. Indeed, if it is feasible and advantageous to the Africans, doing away with Western knowledge would

show that African epistemological base is sound and would possibly allow Africa to be viewed with greater respect and recognition. Resultantly, it would signify that Africa also has the legitimate knowledge systems of its own, which would possibly go a long way in restoring the pride and self-confidence of Africans, which they were robbed of by the whole process of colonisation. However, an abrupt divorce from Western knowledge is a challenge given that the use of English has to continue.

Another participant was of the opinion that decolonisation of the curriculum must speak to matters related to marginalised people in society, amplifying their voices and making the world know about them.

In my own opinion, a decolonised curriculum must show that it embraces all the cultures and all the people equally, regardless of gender, physical challenges, social class and so forth. For example, our own drama students need to present dramas in our Netherlands Hall, here, on vulnerable groups, educating the whole university about need for equality and the levels of inequality in this country (Participant seven, May, 2020).

A decolonised curriculum must have sections that indicate lessons which emphasise the interaction of people of all cultures and socio-economic backgrounds within communities since we are training students for the community. Teaching theory, theory, theory, ummmm, to me, it is a colonial perspective (Participant ten, May, 2020).

These sentiments suggest that decolonisation can go a long way in fighting social injustices. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) holds that decolonisation will bring about

African universities that are sites of social justice. The researchers view this point as quite valid. However, it may be achieved through active endeavours by local scholars who can conduct research on African issues, focusing on, for example, physically challenged people, marginalised cultures, gender issues and similar topics. Furthermore, the scholars ought to write books and articles that can then be used by lecturers when designing their teaching modules and even used by artists to make dramas as categorically suggested by the participant. It is worth noting that in this era of COVID-19, the inclusion of drama is likely to heighten the spread of COVID-19.

There were three lecturers who were not keen on decolonisation of the curriculum. Generally, they were of the view that there is nothing untoward about the status quo. To them, the issue of decolonisation of HEIs was just rhetoric by Africans who just want to prove to the Western world that new developments are taking place in Africa:

Aaah, you know what, this noise that was happening in South Africa in 2016 about a free and decolonised higher education was just promulgated by opposition parties like the EFF who wanted political mileage. I do not think those people who talk about decolonisation in the education fraternity are serious at all (Participant three, April, 2020).

I do not have much to say on this topic because I do not support decolonisation of tertiary institutions. Why should that happen yet everything we are doing in Africa originated from the West? (Participant eight, May, 2020).

People just talk and talk about this thing of decolonisation but nothing comes of it. A lot of conferences have

taken place on this topic but, look, we still teach material from the West. All the theories I teach my students originated from the West. If we abolish them, there is nothing to teach (Participant twelve, May, 2020).

These three participants were openly against the process of decolonising the curriculum. They raised very interesting views in support of the current scenario. They see lack of seriousness in the whole matter. For instance, participant twelve highlighted a lack of local theories to replace Western theories. This seems to be a formidable task which Newfield and Bryne (2018) describes as an insurmountable challenge. This brings to light the idea of lack of material to use when decolonising the curriculum. This is a huge hurdle which speaks of Africans having to develop their own systems first before changing the status quo. For instance, Africans ought to be more active in scholarly authorship and propound theories and laws in various fields of study with a special focus on the African context.

Implementation of Decolonisation of Higher Education Institutions

The study looked at ways to implement the decolonisation of higher education institutions (HEIs). NUL lecturers had divergent ideas on how this can be done. One of the participants points out that there is need to be careful of what sort of knowledge is delivered to university students:

I think the best way to implement the decolonisation of the HEIs is to ensure that the curriculum is designed with local knowledge in mind and not to keep on teaching content full of Western ideas (Participant four, April, 2020).

These views reflect how to deal with the problem of Eurocentric knowledge. The focus here is on the content, prompting university lecturers to rethinking about what is supposed to be taught. The whole idea is doing away with Western perspectives, replacing them with African or local ones. However, the question is whether or not African knowledge will be adequate on its own. On this, Nyoni (2019) favour the mixture of Western and African knowledge systems.

As for participant nine, the transformation ought to commence with an overhaul of the staff complement such that universities do away with white and Indian lecturers and substitute them with black lecturers:

First and foremost, there is need for hiring black lecturers, not whites and Indians so that blacks can bring about real transformation of the curriculum (Participant nine, May, 2020).

This method of decolonising the curriculum seems to be a hardliner position since it has racial connotations. A solution with racial tones is controversial since some might argue that it will be a matter of solving a problem but creating another one in the process. Barring white people from university teaching would just be indefensible discrimination. In fact, one may ask: *why would they not be allowed in universities and then allowed in all other sectors of work?* That is why Fataar (2018) cautions that the decolonisation of higher education debate should now turn to reflections about the terms of the knowledge and curriculum veracity.

Another way of implementing decolonisation of the curriculum suggested by participant eleven is to avail the

curriculum to as many students as possible, opening opportunities for black students:

> A decolonised pedagogy is one in which the curriculum has to be loosened somehow for students to excel in their studies at tertiary level. Again, to cater for large number of students not to put strict mechanisms which limit Africans in programmes of their choices. However, this may be difficult to achieve now due to COVID-19. (Participant eleven, May, 2020).

This is a clear case of opening up university education to the African child. However, if it is achieved by making the curriculum easier, it is a sure case of lowering standards at universities. This is not desirable given that it usually catch up with the graduates in the workplace since it brews incompetency. Furthermore, lowering entry requirements at universities so as to enrol many students tend to have similar consequences. These are populist methods which yield undesirable outcomes.

Participant six submits that decolonisation of the curriculum can be implemented through the removal of complicated literature books authored by Shakespeare as well as using the local language:

> As for me, another way to decolonise the curriculum, particularly for us in the humanities is for the scrapping of Western literature books such as Macbeth and William Shakespeare books which often give our students headaches (Participant six, April, 2020).

> NUL must implement decolonisation of the curriculum through adopting Sesotho as the official language. This is happening in other countries such as China, USA, France and others (Participant thirteen, May, 2020).

These sentiments speak of Africanising literature content within the curriculum. Apart from this, there is an element of shying away from challenging content in the curriculum as advocated by participant two as well. However, Motsa (2017) warns that transformation of the curricular cannot be achieved by instantaneously banning Shakespeare books at universities. This warning may be genuine given that such books have always provided students with sharp critical and analytical skills suitable for literature graduates. Finding replacements for such books might also be a challenge if hasty decisions are adopted.

The use of Sesotho as suggested by participant thirteen sounds like a radical move for a university to take. It would not be possible for NUL to embrace diversity once a local language is used for official business. It can also be argued that this will be setting up the graduates for failure in future because they might not be able to compete effectively in the global market.

> According to participant fourteen, implementation of decolonisation at NUL should be done through opting for African knowledge only and material from the African continent:

> I would suggest some changes to be made in the curriculum so that the knowledge to be delivered by the lecturers is Africa-centred knowledge and not the usual Western knowledge (Participant fourteen, May, 2020).

The central tenet for the decolonisation of the curriculum here is the content to be taught, that it should be African oriented. This finding resonates with the one unearthed by Webbstock (2017) where other

participants viewed a decolonised curriculum as mainly what is taught, citing that module instructors need to indigenise or Africanise the syllabus so as to escalate its significance.

In line with that, participant two and fourteen also added that there is need to addressing decolonisation issues at the level of content, ensuring that African content replaces Western content:

> I recommend a curriculum that puts Africa first in terms of the content to be taught. Lecturers need to use local case studies and not those abroad. We cannot allow a curriculum that makes us teach about Bismarck of Germany, and Mao Tse-tung of China and not our own Patrice Lumumba of Congo and Nelson Mandela of South Africa (Participant two, April, 2020).

> One method of decolonising the curriculum design is to recommend books and research articles that have been written by Africans on African issues (Participant fourteen, May, April, 2020).

The issue is around content to be delivered to students, that it is has to resonate with African issues and not foreign issues. This therefore calls for African scholars to ensure that they publish books and research articles that will be utilised to get African content. Jansen (2017) observes that changes in the representation of curriculum knowledge also highlights that decolonisation of HEIs signifies a move towards an Africa-centred knowledge system. Students also criticise the nature of content they are being taught (Morreira, 2017). These criticisms are justified given that some of the content as well as pedagogic practices perpetuate exclusion of students and widens the attainment gap.

Other participants hold that the way to implement decolonisation of the curricular was to incorporate racial, cultural and gender issues within the curriculum:

> I want to emphasise that the curriculum of a decolonised university has to reflect changes in patriarchal and sexist issues. The new curriculum must remove gender inequalities in its content so that students receive new socialisation too during lectures (Participant seven, May, 2020).

> I am of the view that a decolonised curriculum must contain issues to do with the removal of racial traits. One other thing is that it must uplift marginalised cultures by calling people from the community to exhibit their culture at NUL Due to COVID-19, social distancing must be monitored (Participant ten, May, 2020).

The responses given by participant seven and ten above clearly show that these lecturers are both in the human or social sciences. This is because it is difficult to implement racial, cultural and gender transformations in the pure sciences. Participant ten mentioned one of the WHO (2020b) guidelines of observing social distancing. The transformations cited by these participants suggest the lecturers do not want course outlines or modules that are silent about such issues because it might perpetuate social inequalities.

One participant who seemed very fond of these decolonisation issues had this to say:

> The most important thing about a decolonised curriculum is the unity it must bring between lecturers and students. The curriculum must include teaching approaches that nurture these bonds between lecturers and students.

A clear distinction must be shown between the colonial era and post-colonial period when one looks at teaching approaches used. Examples are organising excursions with students and practical activities during lectures (Participant ten, May, 2020).

Coming from a lecturer who exhibits exuberance in teaching students, it is understandable why the lecturer was suggesting that in a post-colonial era, students must be shown unity. This suggests that in the colonial period the approaches used were alienating lecturers from their students. Following these views, it calls upon lecturers to employ approaches that are free of alienation so that students learn in a conducive environment. These noble endeavours may be hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Tabatadze and Chachkhiani (2021) suggest that the implementation of emergency remote teaching requires educators to acquire context and need-based professional development.

Challenges posed by COVID-19

In almost all countries worldwide, COVID-19 caused the closure of all entities except essential services in what was termed a global lockdown. Lesotho instituted its lockdown from midnight 29 March 2020 to 21 April 2020. During that period, people were staying at home to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Given the views expressed by NUL lecturers on implementation of decolonisation issues, COVID-19 poses numerous challenges to the decolonisation of HEI curriculum. For instance, participant one alluded to the fact that technology signifies a colonial mentality where people believe anything foreign is better; thus called for local ways of teaching students. NUL students are scattered all over Lesotho and some students originate from other countries – including Eswatini, Malawi, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon and Zimbabwe. In a scenario like this, there is no way lecturers can do away with Western methods of teaching. Taking advantage of technology, which participant one argues to be one of the Western things that need to be eradicated, NUL lecturers were able to continue teaching utilising the university's Thuto online facility. Thus, those who advocate for wholesale discarding of all the things viewed as Western ought to present convincing facts that there are fit-for-purpose substitutes to such facilities. One cannot just throw away something that works without giving a better alternative.

Participant eleven suggests that there is need to cater for large numbers of students when admitting students into the various programmes offered at NUL. Again, this is not feasible in the era of COVID-19 since lecture rooms must now accommodate a much less number of students due to social distancing guidelines put up by the WHO (2020b). This also speaks to increase in staff compliment as large classes must be split into smaller ones. The same applies to an idea thrown by participant two that drama students need to present dramas in Netherlands Hall. Social gatherings tend to heighten people's chances of contracting the coronavirus.

COVID-19 is also going to pose some challenges to participant ten's decolonisation strategy of hiring black lecturers and not whites so as to attain real transformation of the curriculum. Due to COVID-19, NUL cannot afford to engage in the process of firing staff and hiring others. Those to be hired might be coming from various countries and there is a possibility that they may bring coronavirus into Lesotho. The WHO (2020b) highlights that COVID-19 is

also spread by being in direct contact with an infected person. Decolonisation methods such as mingling with community members, inviting villages to showcase their culture and carrying out excursions with students put people at high risk of contracting COVID-19. Hence, such strategies are not feasible as long as the vaccine rollout in Africa has not enabled communities to reach herd immunity. Overall, universities can hardly implement these strategies without endangering the lives of both lecturers and students.

CONCLUSION

The decolonisation of HEIs is a broad concept. This study focused on curriculum issues. Insights of educators in HEIs into the decolonisation of higher education were studied in terms of how NUL lecturers conceptualise decolonisation of HEIs. The majority of NUL lecturers were enthusiastic about the decolonisation of the curriculum, especially those lecturers in the education, humanities and social sciences faculties. Some conceptualised the decolonisation of the curriculum as one that is completely detached from Western paradigms and using local indigenous knowledge systems and content signifying that Africa has its own epistemological foundations and systems. However, this detachment can be challenging if African universities do not have the material to replace Western knowledge with. Their definitions also took into consideration issues around language, technology, culture, race, marginalised groups and whatever they thought was of benefit to the students. While these definitions revealed a conviction with decolonisation issues for most lecturers, some of the definitions spoke of compromising of university standards.

Apart from definitions of HEIs, focus was also placed on NUL lecturers' perceptions about how the colonial curriculum should be transformed. Some of the participants suggested the decolonisation of the curriculum in terms of the use of African methods of teaching, stop copying the West, enrolling more black students, adopting Sesotho as the official language, hiring of blacks only, engaging with the villagers for cultural growth and partaking in excursions. Some of the strategies are likely to have financial implications to the university for them to be implemented. Hence, the chances for such methods to succeed are slim. The COVID-19 pandemic was found to be a major challenge for the implementation of some of the strategies. This is because some of these methods had potential to aid the spread the virus. Only three lecturers were against decolonisation of the curriculum citing the following three reasons: there is nothing wrong with the status quo; this issue is not a crucial issue and the absence of local content to replace the one from the West. Overall, decolonisation of the curriculum is a worthwhile process given that the colonial system was biased against blacks and was fraught with inequalities. However, decolonisation of higher education must not be over-simplified to the extent of taking it as simple matter of discarding everything that is viewed to be of Western origin. Such an approach could most probably be motivated by an intrinsic abhorrence of the colonial past rather than the need to uplift the education system.

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