Bulgrin, Eva; Singh, Marcina; Sayed, Yusuf

University leadership views and practices about decolonising initial teacher education in higher education spaces in South Africa

Breinbauer, Ines Maria [Hrsg.]; Krause, Sabine [Hrsg.]: Dekoloniales Denken in der Lehrer:innenbildung. Neue Perspektiven und Herausforderungen für die Professionalisierung. Bad Heilbrunn : Verlag Julius Klinkhardt 2025, S. 87-103

Quellenangabe/ Reference:
Bulgrin, Eva; Singh, Marcina; Sayed, Yusuf: University leadership views and practices about decolonising initial teacher education in higher education spaces in South Africa - In: Breinbauer, Ines Maria [Hrsg.]; Krause, Sabine [Hrsg.]: Dekoloniales Denken in der Lehrer:innenbildung. Neue Perspektiven und Herausforderungen für die Professionalisierung. Bad Heilbrunn : Verlag Julius Klinkhardt 2025, S. 87-103 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-335806 - DOI: 10.25656/01:33580; 10.35468/6177-05

https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-335806
https://doi.org/10.25656/01:33580

in Kooperation mit / in cooperation with:

k linkhardt

http://www.klinkhardt.de

Eva Bulgrin, Marcina Singh und Yusuf Sayed

University leadership views and practices about decolonising initial teacher education in Higher Education spaces in South Africa

Abstract

The #Rhodesmustfall and #Feesmustfall protests that took place in South African higher education (HE) between 2015 and 2016 was in part a response to the persistence of knowledge canons and forms that arguably subjugated and delegitimised Southern knowledges and (re) produced colonial, apartheid and Eurocentric understandings of what it means to be literate academically (Mahabeer 2018; Sathorar & Geduld 2018). Yet, strikingly, there is considerable silence about teachers and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) as well as the role of teachers and teacher education in dismantling (neo-) colonial approaches in and through education. Teachers, in particular, are powerfully positioned to realise democracy in and through how they teach and what they teach, and teacher preparation programmes are crucial in this regard. Yet teacher education as the critical nexus between what occurs in schools and higher education has been neglected in public, policy, and research discourses and practices (cf. also Mamdani 2018; Sayed et al. 2017).

In the above context, our chapter aims to deconstruct the (neo-) colonial and apartheid legacy in teacher preparation programmes through an in-depth and fine-grained case study of an initial teacher education programme offered by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, an HEI based in Cape Town, which is also the largest provider of teacher education in the province (CPUT 2022; Robinson & McMillan 2006). In particular, this institution reflects the historical, spatial and knowledge divisions of apartheid campuses. Drawing from in-depth interviews with deans, heads of departments and teacher educators, we illuminate how this institution navigates the legacy of apartheid whilst meeting the imperatives of decolonising initial teacher education. We argue that ITE programmes have the ability and should sensitise student teachers about what a decolonial education system can and should look like validating and centring diversity and Southern knowledge systems. In doing so, this chapter contributes to epistemic disruption in teacher education, providing insights into the potential pitfalls of decentring teacher education in the African context.

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

Keywords: (neo-)colonial legacy, leadership, South Africa, teacher education, decolonising, higher education

1 Introduction

The #Rhodesmustfall and #Feesmustfall protests that took place within higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa between 2015 and 2016 were, in part, a response to the persistence of knowledge canons that arguably subjugated and delegitimised Southern knowledges and (re)produced colonial, apartheid and Eurocentric understandings of what it means to be literate academically (Mahabeer 2018; Sathorar & Geduld 2018). Yet, there is considerable silence about teachers and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) as well as the role of teachers and teacher education in dismantling (neo-)colonial approaches in and through education, with some exceptions (Khoja-Moolji 2017; Martin & Pirbhai-Illich 2016; Toohey & Smythe 2021). In addition, there are few studies that focus on the experiences and views of university leadership in pursuing the call to decolonise higher education spaces in the context of teacher education. This is an essential gap to address because teachers, in particular, are powerfully positioned to realise democracy in and through how and what they teach. Teacher preparation programmes are crucial in this regard. Teacher education, as the critical nexus between schools and higher education, has been neglected in public policy and research discourses and practices (cf. also Mamdani 2018; Sayed et al. 2017).

In the above context, our chapter aims to deconstruct the (neo-)colonial and apartheid legacy in teacher preparation programmes through the views and experiences of university leaders at a university of technology in South Africa which is also the largest provider of teacher education in the province. By eliciting the views of these respondents, this chapter responds to the question: What are university leaders' views and experiences of decolonisation within a teacher preparation programme at a university of technology in the Western Cape Province of South Africa? We argue that ITE programmes have the ability to sensitise student teachers about what a decolonial education system can and should look like while validating and centring diversity and Southern knowledge systems. In doing so, this chapter contributes to epistemic disruption in teacher education, providing insights into the potential pitfalls of decentring teacher education in the African context from the perspective of university leadership.

Our chapter firstly provides a brief overview of the current debate on decolonising teacher education, focusing on South Africa and examining issues, such as curriculum and teacher education programmes in higher education, from a leadership perspective. Secondly, the chapter explains the background of the study, which was informed by a decolonial and institutional framework. Thirdly, the findings

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

on the themes of curriculum and pedagogy are presented from the perspective of leaders.

2 Decolonisation of Teacher Education in South Africa

This section explores the definitions and discourses around decolonising the curriculum. We also explore interlinking concepts of decolonisation, such as indigenisation, Africanisation and internationalisation, before considering the epistemological dimension of decolonisation.

2.1 Definitional opening

We commence the discussion by unpacking what we mean by colonisation and decolonisation. South Africa experienced colonialism under the Portuguese, Dutch and British from the 15th to the 20th centuries, followed by the apartheid system (1948-1994). Jansen (2017 cited in Le Grange 2018, p. 9) argues that 'apartheid was a particular manifestation of coloniality'. Oppressive social structures, particularly concerning constructions of race, gender and class, expanded the domination of colonialists during colonialism and apartheid. While colonialism points to a hierarchically organised political and economic relationship between two nation-states, coloniality, as a result of colonialism, refers to the ongoing uneven power relations with implications for culture, labour and knowledge production beyond the previous colonial administration (McKinney & Christie 2022, p. xiii). Aníbal Quijano (cited in Castro Varela & Dhawan 2020, p. 331) frames coloniality as the 'structures and processes that emerged from colonial conditions and that also shape current global power and dominance structures'. Sayed, Motala and De Kock (2021) note that decolonisation in teacher education raises questions about what and whose knowledge is affirmed, and material questions about higher education resourcing and student material needs which this paper addresses focusing on the perspectives of university leaders. As such, decolonisation is about deconstructing prevailing Westernised, Eurocentric discourses and practices, and the undoing of racial and social inequalities (Mbembe 2019) to achieve social justice. The move to decolonise HEIs through the curriculum is essential because HEIs, as microcosms of society, are part of a broader social transformation process. As such, decolonising the curriculum has to be conceptualised as a *political and economic project* that critiques capitalistic and neoliberal norms as

> [d]ecolonisation of higher education in general and teacher education in particular, creates the possibility of realising substantive equity and quality in the process of learning in changing times and in a changing global context (Sayed & Motala 2018, p. 44).

In the South African contexts, decolonisation is often used interchangeably with concepts such as Africanisation, indigenisation, internationalisation and, in some

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

instances, even transformation, social justice and inclusion. First, Africanising, as a synonym for 'decolonising processes taking place on the African continent' (Le Grange 2018, p. 10), englobes Africanisation and Africanism. While the former points to the 'systematic and deliberate deployment of Africans in positions', the latter involves 'African culture [in] the centre of Africa's development' (Le Grange 2018, p. 10). While we acknowledge the importance of creating a counter-narrative to Eurocentric knowledge productions, we also remain sceptical as Africanising could be read as another process of legitimising knowledge in geographical terms, particularly in terms of the (cultural) diversity of and between African nation-states. Second, 'indigenising concerns the inclusion of indigenous ways of knowing and being in social and education processes' (Le Grange 2018, p. 10). Indigenous can be understood as 'unique, local, traditional knowledge' however, it is not strictly confined to territories or people. Indigenous scholars use new spaces resulting from globalisation 'for building solidarities among Indigenous peoples across the globe' (Le Grange 2018, p. 11). Indigenising and Africanising intersect in that Africanising includes indigenous knowledges. Finally, internationalisation refers to solidarity among the (previously) colonised and oppressed while also 'recognising different knowledge traditions' (Le Grange 2018, p. 11).

Existing literature on decolonising teacher education in African contexts refers predominantly to issues of curriculum, study programmes and teaching practices (Ajani & Gamede 2021; Mahabeer 2018). Thus, for this chapter, we focus on the role of leadership in teacher education programmes and how these individuals understand and action the call for decolonising higher education in South Africa, specifically in initial teacher education. As our chapter focuses on holistic leadership, we will start our discussion here.

2.2 Leadership

Leadership is essential for improving student outcomes and bringing about change in universities. Decolonising universities and schools happens through the people in leadership positions (Du Plessis 2021). However, Du Plessis (2021) states that many lecturers dispose of limited knowledge about decolonising the curricula and, when decolonising the curriculum in concrete terms, show reluctance. Also, the identities of their faculty staff are historically racialised and show considerable divergence from what they understand and practice as decolonisation. As a way forward, Du Plessis (2021) states that being reflexive about one's positionality and entanglement with a system and culture of inequality and racism is the first step to developing decolonial teaching practices (cf. also McKinney & Christie 2022). The attitudes and concrete teaching practices of lecturers are fundamental as they 'engage in both the curriculum and their pedagogies critically, self-reflexively and imaginatively' (Du Plessis 2021, p. 62). Moreover, paying attention and giving voice (and power) to the previously marginalised (students, teachers and lecturers)

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

as well as knowing the context of students' realities well, are essential factors for a deep intellectual engagement with decolonising the curriculum. Finally, engagement dialogue and a social justice approach are crucial to decolonising higher education (Du Plessis 2021).

2.2.1 Curriculum

The scholarly literature on curricula focuses on the role of different actors in decolonising teacher education curricula, notably, students, lecturers and curriculum-makers. Mahabeer (2018) states that curriculum decision-makers are catalytic agents in search of humanising the curriculum through home-grown knowledge. By humanising the curriculum, she refers to a humanist approach to curriculum which enables students to reach their full potential through whole person education. In taking into account intellectual and affective dimensions of learning as well as relational situations, students can develop critical thinking. Moreover, Mahabeer considers the indigenisation, Africanisation, decolonisation, humanisation, Westernisation and Eurocentrism of the curriculum as co-existing realities enabling the curriculum to transform in post-colonial settings, such as in South Africa. Therefore, curriculum makers for teacher education need to 'construct pragmatic alternatives for a contextually relevant curriculum that disrupts dominant Westernised knowledge systems and places them alongside indigenous knowledge systems' (Mahabeer 2018, p. 11).

From the viewpoint of lecturers, Sayed et al. (2017) conceptualise the decolonisation of the teacher education curriculum as giving 'expression to an imaginary beyond existing thought and institutions' (Sayed et al. 2017, p. 61). They articulate three significant insights: first, lecturers' curriculum decisions are shaped in multiple ways; second, lecturers often occupy a problematic space as mediators of teaching and learning; and third, lecturers often seem unable to articulate in concrete terms what a decolonised curriculum might look like, making visible the incompleteness, fragility and contested nature of knowledge production. Similarly, Pillay and Swanepoel (2019) state that a collaborative approach, Ubuntu and sharing knowledge, as a means for writing and teaching the curriculum, are critical dimensions to take into account, as also exemplified by Nabudere (2011 cited by Ajani & Gamede 2021, p. 127) who maintains that:

> [t]eacher education in the South African context calls for preservice teachers to be groomed together, learn together and share knowledge to promote and preserve human histories as well as epistemologies of human beings from the Cradle.

Sayed and Motala (2018) argue that decolonising the curriculum in HE must transcend binary forms of thought by questioning hegemonic forms of knowing of Western thought and critically engaging with traditional and indigenous knowledge production. In addition, a decolonised curriculum must consider colonial

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

language issues and decolonised teacher education systemic shifts in how teachers relate to the curriculum. Finally, epistemological decolonisation challenges debates on excellence and relevance in HE based on the historical difference between traditional white and black universities.

2.2.2 Teacher education programmes

Linked to the above discussion, Sathorar and Geduld (2018) discuss a study programme for teacher education, informed by a critical conceptual framework, resulting from the curriculum renewal process in South Africa, highlighting the significance of taking the local context into account in selecting learning material, presenting lessons, and bridging the theory-practice nexus. Departing from these assumptions, the authors developed a teacher education model with four phases: bridging, becoming, being and belonging.[1] This model encourages student teachers to transform their thinking about teaching in South Africa, as suggested by the authors. In the US, Mawhinney et al. (2020) examined the attempt to build a decolonised teacher education programme in a predominantly and historically white settler institution with the aim to decolonise the minds of their predominantly white, female, monolingual preservice teacher population. Despite mostly successful experiences, the authors also acknowledge some limitations as, for example, not all instructors embraced the social justice approach and others acted with micro-aggression towards students of colour. Similarly, Marom (2023) observes a contradiction in the Canadian education system which declares itself a promoter of multiculturalism and inclusivity. However, subtle forms of racism and White normativity are infused in the daily practices of teachers. These observations raise questions about how teaching and learning, as part of a pedagogical approach, are informed, as explored subsequently.

2.2.3 Pedagogy

Teachers need to be sensitive to past experiences, be effective in the present and be cognisant of the future. This creates a challenging task for teacher training providers, particularly those who manage such institutions. In a comparative study in the UK, India and Canada, Martin and Pirbhai-Illich (2016) showed how deeply the minds of UK preservice teachers are infused with neo-colonial narratives and object-based, modernist understandings of development. As current education systems are still infused by violence and Eurocentric forms of knowledge production, they plead for alternative approaches to teaching and learning, such as creating an intercultural space, known as the Third Space, based on critical relationality for a non-Othering pedagogy for social justice.

1 For a more comprehensive discussion, see the original paper from Sathorar and Geduld (2018)

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

Reflecting on their discussions about teacher educators and those involved in the managing of teacher education faculties, McKinney and Christie (2022) note that contestations that highlighted aspects such as coloniality, racism, class and gender violence was a steep learning curve for both teacher educators and students. Their statement highlights that decolonising pedagogy embraces a rethinking of teaching and learning and remains reflexive about one's positionality.

The review above highlights the key ideas and concepts which frame this paper. In light of South Africa's colonial and apartheid legacy, this paper considers how HEIs in South Africa, specifically teacher education providers, deconstruct Westernised, Eurocentric, colonial and apartheid worldviews in their knowledge systems and curricula (Mahabeer 2018; Sathorar and Geduld 2018). As previously outlined, we use decolonisation to unpack the political, economic and epistemic effect of colonisation. In this paper, we are particularly interested in how higher education leaders manage South Africa's colonial and apartheid legacy in relation to how teacher-training curricula are constructed by examining social processes that allow for the (re)production of knowledge and positional hierarchies informed by colonialism.

3 Background of the study

Becoming a teacher in South Africa has undergone monumental shifts in the last 30 years, particularly regarding location and control (Chisholm 2019). During apartheid, Black African, Coloured, White and Indian Teachers[2] were trained in racially defined teacher training colleges, including varied approaches to quality. When South Africa transitioned from apartheid to a democratic system in 1994, the teacher education landscape in South Africa was highly fragmented, located in a wide variety of institutional sites, in contact and distance mode. The post-apartheid dispensation sought to overhaul entrenched racial legacies by ensuring that the quality of teacher training programmes is not determined by race. This resulted in the merging of teacher training colleges into existing HEIs or, in some cases, merging to form entirely new institutions. Today, 24 HEIs graduate about 25 000 teachers a year. Previously underqualified teachers have also undergone (re)training or additional training to ensure quality standards reflect the post-apartheid education policy imperatives.

The findings reported in this chapter present data of leaders at a university where multiple teaching colleges were merged to start a new faculty of education within a newly established university of technology. In particular, this institution reflects the historical, spatial and knowledge divisions of apartheid campuses. One cam-

2 Racial categories defined by the state and solidified through the Population Registration Act of 1950.

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

pus is situated close to the urban centre consisting of a diverse student and educator population group. The other campus is situated further away from the urban centre and is much less diverse racially and socio economically, with a mostly White and Coloured student and educator population.

3.1 Methodology

This chapter presents the views of university leadership about decolonisation and how this has impacted on and is realised in practice. The findings are based on semi-structured interviews conducted with leaders at various levels of the university and provide rich insights to challenge how teachers may conceptualise power and privilege and to rethink the norms of praxis (cf. also Pillay & Swanepoel 2019). The first level of leadership, being Tier 1, contains leaders at the helm of the university, such as chancellors and deputy vice chancellors. Tier 2 leaders are the heads of departments and managers within the Faculty of Education who also teach on the teacher preparation programmes. In total, we interviewed five university deans and heads of departments. The table below gives an overview of the respondents' demographic profiles.

Tab. 1: Overview of respondents

	Respondent	Age Range	Gender	Race	Role/s
1	AT	50+	F	White	Deputy Dean
2	HD	50+	F	White	Deputy Dean
3	RB	50+	M	Indian	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
4	MS	50+	F	Coloured	Head of Department
5	CO	50+	M	Black	Head of Department

All ethical clearances were obtained, and the necessary protocols observed. We analysed the interviews using thematic analysis (cf. Braun & Clarke 2006). In addition, policy analysis complemented the analysis of interview data showing the complex interrelationship between policy as text and policy as mediated by university leaders as agents. We applied content analysis to the most critical policy documents concerning ITE, including all levels[3] of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE 2011), the Teaching Standards and Teacher Registration Requirements/Standards from the South African Council for Teacher Educators (SACE) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). These policy texts were explored by considering the use of the following words, including the word stems, in selected policy documents: *de-/colonise*; *de-/colonize*; *de-/colo-*

3 Foundation, intermediate, senior and FET.

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

nisation; *de-/colonization.* As an authorial team with different ages, gender and origins from two different institutions in South Africa and the UK, still with a long experience of working together, we engaged in productive discussions about where we situate ourselves in our research and writing and, last but not least, what we understand by decolonisation.

3.2 Findings

This section highlights the views and insights of education faculty leaders. First, we discuss the interview data from the perspectives of university and faculty leaders which is followed by a policy analysis. While the data show multiple understandings of what it means to decolonise the curriculum and pedagogy, and how decolonisation is enacted and intertwined with bureaucratic processes, the policy analysis is surprising by the absence of debate.

3.2.1 The perspectives of university leaders

Tier 1 leaders noted that their understanding of decolonisation cannot be divorced from bureaucratic processes which seek to enable more equitable education systems. Thus, decolonising HEIs includes an interrogation of existing policies and procedures. This is particularly important in the South African context, where education institutions were the bastions of apartheid, perpetuating inequalities and discrimination at all levels.

3.2.2 Approaches to decolonisation within the institution

In discussion with a Tier 1 leader, three key strategies emerged reflecting the HEI's response to decolonisation. The first strategy was to overhaul the programme offering and, simultaneously, ensure that lecturers are trained to deliver the new courses. However, equipping leadership to manage these changes effectively has received less attention, as noted below.

> I think Universities of Technology are being predominantly affected by virtue of the phase-out of a number of other kinds of qualifications … [So the] university has to ensure alignment with that and ensuring the kind of smooth transition between the old and the new, phasing out of old programmes and bringing in new programmes. This is probably one of the biggest changes this university has experienced, even from a financial point of view. (RB, A&B, M, I)

Second, new programme offerings and curricula centred on the values of internationalisation and good citizenship:

> [We had to ensure] at a broad university wide level, that our curriculum and our programme … had to be forward looking, especially with our 2030 vision, [for example] around the decolonisation project, but also aspects around ensuring that our graduate attributes were well taught, ideas around good citizenry… And then, of course, the whole

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

> idea around internationalisation, the whole international aspect around our curriculum was, you know, was lacking and we had to ensure that we incorporated that. (RB)

Third, the response below suggests that, although approaches to decolonisation in HEIs often tend to focus on aspects such as curriculum, pedagogy and relationships, ensuring qualification compliance with the necessary education authorities and ensuring the delivery of quality and relevant programmes also influence students' experiences and should therefore also be given the same level of importance.

> People sat down and theorised the fact that we needed this change … but nobody sat down and worked out how this was going to actually take place … We've just been inundated with these areas around enrolment planning, around professional bodies and, so on. (RB)

> We've also put in quality assurance aspects. I've introduced a committee called the QEC, Qualifications Evaluation Committee, which is made up of experts that look at submissions between the different universities … before they go to the CHE and the Department of Education … (RB)

The three quotes above suggest that strategies to decolonise HEIs, including their programmes, not only involve a change at the level of teaching and learning but also at a systemic level that includes the professional development of teachers and faculty leaders, promoting the values of internationalisation and citizenship as well as navigating some of the bureaucratic processes.

3.2.3 The perspectives of faculty leaders

Faculty-based leadership shared their views on their strategies for decolonising teacher training programmes. These responses are discussed in relation to two themes: curriculum and pedagogy.

3.2.3.1 Curriculum

There has been much debate about the relevance of current teacher education programmes to the needs of contemporary society in South Africa and, arguably, elsewhere (Sayed et al. 2017). The respondents suggested that a decolonised curriculum included aspects of Africanisation, indigeneity, transformation and social justice. These are illuminated in the quotes below:

> If I look at the curriculum and that the curriculum must be more Africanised and more made to fit the African way of thinking and the indigenous knowledge of South Africa … and Africa to be incorporated into the content knowledge of the different subjects. So that is the one way of decolonising higher education. (AT)

> But then, on the other side of this … that has to do with transformation in our education … I think more of multilingual approach where we acknowledge the languages of the students and we try to address their needs and open up the knowledge in their

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

> home language. And that is also something that is embedded in our language policy of the university, they move in that way, but I think that is also something that happens very slowly. (AT)

Similarly, Sayed and Motala (2018) argue that a decolonised curriculum must consider colonial language issues. This includes indigenous knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems, as a third space (Ajani and Gamede 2021) that is based on critical relationality for a non-Othering pedagogy for social justice (Martin & Pirbhai-Illich 2016, p. 369) alongside disrupting dominant Westernised knowledge systems and places (Mahabeer 2018). This concept was articulated as:

> For me, it's very much an awareness of… retribution. But setting things right that were not, that are not right in our institutions. I'm also fascinated by that because I teach a colonising language subject (English). How can one make this subject applicable and relevant to students and to bring in social justice [as well as] equal opportunities in awareness of that? And to see if one can empower everybody and take away the, the implied power of colonisation and language that we sit with. So language is such a powerful tool and one can do much with that to, to enhance social justice. (HD)

One faculty leader noted that the leadership had the will to change the curriculum. However, the change process was slow, and it was challenging to balance critical thinking with the prescriptiveness of the school curriculum. The quote below indicates that certain subjects were more amenable to change than others:

> I think there was a very strong drive to change content [of the curriculum]. I can only speak for my own subject, which was English, where we had strong transformation element, and looking at books … but I can't say that it happened in Maths or in Science or History necessarily … I am not so sure what the reason is [that the change in curriculum has been so slow]. We have many training sessions with staff. We have speakers from outside to come and talk to staff to equip them with knowledge that they will be able to change the content of their subjects. On the other hand, we have to also prepare our students to teach in a schooling system that has a prescribed curriculum. (HD)

Lastly, a faculty head further suggested that the process of decolonising the curriculum should promote the students' voices and increase collaboration between various stakeholders (Du Plessis 2021):

> Well, I hope it leads to students asking more questions and, and lecturers and management. Listening more to students' voices. By giving students a voice and a platform to discuss critical issues and to participate in decision-making, we are creating opportunities for collaborative revision of the curriculum because I don't think we, as lecturers, can decide on our own. (HD)

A collaborative approach to decolonising the curriculum has also been highlighted by Pillay and Swanepoel (2019) and the joint sharing of knowledge and learning by Ajani and Gamede (2021). Overall, the quotes above suggest that faculty leaders understand decolonised curricula to promote Africanisation, indigeneity

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

(particularly the promotion of various languages), transformation and social justice. Promoting students' voices, critical thinking, and teacher-educator autonomy also emerged as skills that advanced the decolonial agenda.

3.2.3.2 Pedagogy

Pedagogical encounters are a focal concern in decolonising teacher education programmes. They include values of inclusivity, embracing diversity, creating affirming spaces, promoting democratic education and militating against decoloniality. A respondent noted that, in some instances, pedagogical approaches, how we teach, including the platforms, are as critical as changing the physical content of the curriculum:

> I think the biggest changes in the curriculum was not so much the content, but maybe in the way in which the curriculum is delivered. And also the way we assess students. (AT)

Secondly, a faculty leader noted that pedagogical encounters include relaying the content, creating learning opportunities for student teachers and developing critical thinking skills, as stated below:

> And then I always like to refer to Adichie's, the single story, usually in the first year, to make students aware and then we end off by reading Americanah in the fourth year so that they experience this whole idea of this wonderful author in Nigeria and what she experienced. And I think Americanah's, to me, very much based on her own life probably when she went to America the first time and many of our students will go to other countries and going to teach there. So it opens up very interesting debate. (HD)

> I think my umbrella … is critical thinking, because we want to send our teachers who will enhance critical thinking in the schools and in the classrooms and to be able to do that, especially the [remote campus] students who are actually very protected and come from very [sheltered] context where they have not [been] exposed to too much diversity, to open up their minds and to let them see a bigger world out there. (HD)

This is in line with Sathorar and Geduld (2018) who highlight the significance of taking local contexts into account in selecting learning material, presenting lessons, and the theory-practice nexus to ensure the transfer from decolonial theory into practice. The responses from faculty leadership relating to pedagogy suggest that how the curriculum is enacted to develop critical thinking skills is crucial in decolonising teacher preparation programmes.

While we understand decolonisation as a process of deconstructing the past and critically interrogating the present to historicise our thinking, we acknowledge the multiple understandings and practices of decolonisation. Most respondents refer to *undoing structures and practices*, as exemplified in a university leader's first quote suggesting overhauling teacher education training. *Alternative discourses or counter-narratives*, such as internationalising or good citizenship education (Tier

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

1 quote) or Africanisation, indigeneity, transformation and social justice, as expressed by various faculty leaders, are other strategies to frame- and circumvent-the topic. Other respondents frame decolonisation as a way of *empowering the previously silenced* when they suggest promoting the students' voices and increasing collaboration between various stakeholders. Overall, decolonising HE started as a grassroots initiative and only partly found its way into leadership perspectives that raises the question of how the topic is represented in policy texts.

4 Absences and omissions of decolonisation in policy

The analysis of various policy documents showed an absence of the decolonisation as a key and explicit educational priority. Overall, despite heightened awareness around decolonisation, significant absences and omissions exist. Some policy documents use alternative terms to frame decolonisation, such as Africanising and indigenising (cf. also Le Grange 2018). For example, the NQF (2008) addresses the role of situational learning, understood as

> the complex and differentiated nature of the South African society, learning to work in nuanced ways in confronting the diverse challenges faced by children in schools and the communities they serve … dealing with diversity, promoting inclusivity and environmental sustainability. (DHET 2008, p. 13, italics added)

All levels of the curricula refer to the value of indigenous knowledge systems as

> acknowledging the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution. (DBE 2011, p. 5)

In doing so, there is an acknowledgement of the complex social, political and economic history of the country, from imperialism, to colonialism and to apartheid, and an awareness of how past political eras impact on the current lived realities of all South Africans.

Other concepts are also used to address or replace decolonisation. Most policy papers address terms, such as in-/equity, equal/-ity, quality and social justice. The CAPS foundation phase mentions these 26 times and the CAPS Grades 4 to 6 mentions it 59 times. However, we also noticed that the frequency of mentions in the NQF decreased from 26 in 2008 to 22 in 2011. In particular, social justice is a popular concept, used, for example, in the foreword of the Minister to the CAPS:

> The Preamble to the Constitution states that the aims of the Constitution are to: ... heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. (Foreword, CAPS, italics added [DBE 2011]).

Whether healing remains feasible in light of South Africa's past remains questionable, but the dominant drive towards social justice can be understood historically

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

and also in the present as South Africa's society is one of the most unequal societies in the world. The CAPS across levels and the SACE teaching standards point to social justice matters to 'avoid marginalisation and exclusion' and promote 'equitable and high quality learning' (SACE 2017) and the Teaching Standards affirms that

> teachers promote social justice and the redress of inequalities within their educational institutions and society more broadly. (SACE 2017, p. 2, italics added)

Whilst terms such as decolonisation are absent, they are partly addressed through the terms of privileging indigenous knowledge and African culture. We have already alluded to the problematic connotations of Africanising in the definitional opening by interpreting it as another process of legitimising knowledge in geographical terms. Moreover, we cannot exclude that structures of colonialism and apartheid persist discursively in policy documents and leaders' perspectives in silencing and side-lining decolonisation through alternative terms.

5 Conclusion

The findings from this case study highlight the challenges experienced by many higher education institutions in the country. They show that approaches to decolonisation vary between different levels of institutional leadership. More senior leaders (Tier 1 leadership) are primarily concerned with redressing discriminatory processes and policies of past political eras. The interview data suggest that, for such leaders, university administration, quality assurance and accreditation are not separate processes and form part of rewriting a decolonised institutional narrative. For middle level leaders (Tier 2 leaders), the understanding of decolonisation is filtered through concepts such as Africanisation, indigeneity, internationalisation and social justice (Le Grange 2018). However, we cannot exclude that these alternative concepts side-line the actual debate of decolonising higher education and re-inscribe colonial and Apartheid discourses. The findings also suggest that leaders at all levels require support in policy and processes to implement curriculum decolonisation. The striking omission of direct reference to decolonisation in policy militates against institutions being able to decolonise the curriculum more assertively although some policy documents acknowledge how the complex social, political and economic history influenced the current local realities.

Teacher preparation programmes have the ability to sensitise student teachers about what a decolonial education system can and should look like. In doing so, this chapter contributes to transforming teacher education, providing insights into the possibilities and challenges of decentring teacher education in the African context from the perspective of university leadership. Decolonisation, as a key

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

education priority in post-colonial contexts, such as South Africa, needs to be given a platform to attain sustainable transformation.

References

Ajani, Oluwatoyin A., & Gamede, Bongani T. (2021): Decolonising Teacher Education Curriculum in South African Higher Education. In: International Journal of Higher Education, 10(5), pp. 121–131. Available under: https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v10n5p121

Braun, Virginia & Clarke, Victoria (2006): Using thematic analysis in psychology. In: Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), pp. 77-101. Available under: http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Castro Varela, Maria & Dhawan, Nikita (2020): Postkoloniale Theorie: Eine kritische Einführung. Stuttgart: UTB GmbH.

Chisholm, Linda (2019): Teacher Preparation in South Africa: History, Policy and Future Directions. Available under: 10.1108/9781787436947.

CPUT (2022): Education Faculty. Available under: https://www.cput.ac.za/academic/faculties/education

Du Plessis, Pierre (2021): Decolonisation of education in South Africa: Challenges to decolonise the university curriculum. In: South African Journal of Higher Education, 35(1), pp. 54–69. Available under: https://doi.org/10.20853/35-1-4426

Khoja-Moolji, Shenila (2017): Pedagogical (Re)encounters: Enacting a decolonial praxis in teacher professional development in Pakistan. Comparative Education Review, 61(May), pp. 146–170. Available under: https://doi.org/10.1086/690298

Kruss, Glenda (2008): Teacher Education and Institutional Change in South Africa. In: Teacher Education in South Africa Series. HSRC Press. Available under: www.hsrcpress.ac.za

Le Grange, Lesley (2018): Decolonising, Africanising, indigenising, and internationalising curriculum studies: Opportunities to (re)imagine the field. In: Journal of Education, 74(2018). Available under: http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i74a01

Mahabeer, Pryah (2018): Curriculum decision-makers on decolonising the teacher education curriculum. In: South African Journal of Education, 38(4), pp. 1–13. Available under: https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v38n4a1705

Mamdani, Mahmood (2018): Introduction: Thinking through Africa's Impasse. In: Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism. Princeton University Press. Available under: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc77c7w.5

Marom, Lilach (2023): The Subtle Work of Whiteness in Canadian Teacher Education. In: Krause, Sabine; Proyer Michelle & Kremsner, Gertraud (ed.): The Making of Teachers in the Age of Migration: Critical Perspectives on the Politics of Education for Refugees, Immigrants and Minorities. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 185–202. Available under: http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350244184.0020

Martin, Fran, & Pirbhai-Illich, Fatima (2016): Towards Decolonising Teacher Education: Criticality, Relationality and Intercultural Understanding. In: Journal of Intercultural Studies, 37(4), pp. 355–372. Available under: https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2016.1190697

Mawhinney, Lynnette; Dell'Angelo, Tabitha; Yessenia Alston, Mariah; Gerity, Megan; Katz, Melissa & Vanderbilt, Angelica (2020): Hope and struggle to decolonise the preservice teachers' mind: An urban teacher education program history. In: Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 42(1), pp. 27–48. Available under: https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2020.1728166

Mbembe, Achille (2019): On the Postcolony. In: On the Postcolony. Available under: https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520917538

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

McKinney, Carolyn & Christie, Pam (2022): Decoloniality, language and literacy: Conversations with teacher educators. Jackson, TN: Ingram.

Pillay, Preya & Swanepoel, Eben (2019): An exploration of higher education teachers' experience of decolonising the Bachelor of Education honours curriculum at a South African university. In: Perspectives in Education, 36(2), pp. 119–131. Available under: https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v36i2.10

Robinson, Maureen & McMillan, Wendy (2006): Who teaches the teachers? Identity, discourse and policy in teacher education. Teaching and Teacher Education, 22(3), pp. 327–336. Available under: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.11.003

Sathorar, Heloise & Geduld, Deidre (2018): Towards decolonising teacher education: Reimagining the relationship between theory and praxis. In: South African Journal of Education, 38(4), pp. 1–12. Available under: https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v38n4a1714

Sayed, Yusuf & Motala, Shireen (2018): Between higher and basic education in South Africa: What does decolonisation mean for teacher education?

Sayed, Yusuf & Bulgrin, Eva (2020): Teacher professional development and curriculum: Enhancing teacher professionalism in Africa (Issue June).

Sayed, Yusuf; Motala, Shireen & De Kock, Tarryn (2021): Epistemic decolonisation in reconstituting higher education pedagogy in South Africa: the student perspective. In: Teaching in Higher Education: Critical Perspectives, 26(7-8), pp. 1002-1018.

Sayed, Yusuf; Motala, Shireen & Hoffman, Nimi (2017): Decolonising initial teacher education in South African universities: More than an event. In: Journal of Education, 68, pp. 59–92. Available under: http://joe.ukzn.ac.za

South Africa. Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2011): Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) Foundation Phase Grades R-3. Pretoria: Government Printers.

South Africa. Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2008): National qualifications framework Act 67 of 2008. Government Gazette 31909, 17 February. Government printer. Available under: https://www.gov.za/documents/national-qualifications-framework-act

South African Council for Educators (SACE) (2017): Professional teaching standards: Draft consultation with teachers and subject and phase specialists. Pretoria. SACE. Available under: https://www.sace.org.za/assets/documents/uploads/sace_65860-2017-10-13-SACE%20Professional%20Teaching%20Standards%20LR.%202.pdf

Toohey, Kelleen & Smythe, Suzanne (2021): A different difference in teacher education: posthuman and decolonising perspectives. In: Language and Education, 0(0), pp. 1–15. Available under: https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2021.1980002

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05

Autor*innen

Bulgrin, Eva,
ORCID: 0000-0002-2177-6719
Philipps-Universität Marburg (Germany) und University of Sussex (UK) School of Education and Social Work, University of Sussex. Centre for International Teacher Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa.
eva.bulgrin@uni-marburg.de

Singh, Marcina, MEd, PhD
ORCID: 0000-0002-2721-7555
University of Johannesburg (South Africa), Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the South African Research Chair for Teaching and Learning. Her areas of interest are citizenship and social cohesion, decolonisation and decoloniality, teacher professional development, education during times of crises and disruptions as well as general aspects relating to teaching and learning.
marcinas@uj.ac.za

Sayed, Yusuf, PhD, MBA
ORCID: 0000-0002-2534-8420
Professor of Education, University of Cambridge, Centre for International Teacher Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa.
Research Topics: Teacher Education; Critical social policy and the state in achieving equity in education, focusing on public private partnerships (PPPs), crises and disruption; Inclusive education, social justice education and pedagogy; Education decolonisation.
yms24@cam.ac.uk

doi.org/10.35468/6177-05