

# Decolonising and Africanising the University Curriculum: Experiences of Selected Zimbabwean and South African Lecturers

Jeriphanos Makaye<sup>1</sup>, Lihle Dube<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Reformed Church University, Zimbabwe

<sup>2</sup>Hillside Teachers College, Zimbabwe

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## ABSTRACT

The call to decolonise and Africanise the university curriculum has been a bone of contention in various educational platforms in Southern Africa as universities and educational institutions seek to provide relevant and quality education. This study sought to explore university lecturers' experiences of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The study adopted the interpretive paradigm in which a phenomenological qualitative design was employed. Informed by the decolonial theory, the study targeted university lecturers in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The lecturers were purposively selected to respond to semi-structured interviews. Five lecturers were selected from each country to respond to face to face or WhatsApp video interviews. Ethical issues such as confidentiality, informed consent and the right to anonymity were upheld. Data were thematically and textually analysed. Findings revealed that most lecturers concur that there is need for universities in Africa to move from rhetoric talk of the decolonisation and Africanisation narrative to walking the talk. There was consensus that policies have been put in place in most institutions but lacked supportive frameworks. The study concluded that while the level of awareness and acceptance of decolonisation and Africanization was high among lecturers, most universities are inadequately resourced to support the agenda. The study recommends that universities should strike a balance between local needs and international needs to cater for diversity, inclusivity and sustainability and relevant assessment models should be adopted in universities.

**Keywords:** Africanisation; decolonisation; university curriculum; assessment models; Eurocentric epistemologies

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The call to decolonise and Africanise the university curriculum has led universities in Southern Africa to introduce various changes in the curriculum in a bid to make the curriculum relevant to African continent. This therefore calls for an assessment of how the implementers (lecturers) grapple with decolonising and Africanising the university curriculum in Zimbabwe and South Africa under different contextual conditions.

Decolonization and Africanization of the curriculum may mean different things to different people and may even be regarded as absurd terms by some (Hungwe & Mkhize, 2022; Chavunduka, 2000). However, despite all this, the call to decolonise and Africanise the university curriculum has gained traction in several African countries including South Africa, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya and Zimbabwe. Universities in these countries are grappling with the idea of detangling from the hegemonic colonial past by trying to make the curriculum relevant to the socio-economic developmental needs of African states (Munikwa & Mapara, 2022, Du Pleiss, 2021, Fataar, 2018). Unlike the previous colonial curriculum which was Eurocentric and forced on African states, the envisaged decolonised and Africanised curriculum is a home-grown curriculum, guided by an African philosophy, embedded within African values and crafted by Africans for Africans. It aims to challenge the dominant Western epistemologies and promote inclusive practices. Therefore, in the context of this study, decolonization and Africanization are conceived as a process of rediscovering what Africans lost due to colonisation (self/identity, relationship with nature, knowledge, values, epistemologies), acting upon such

injustices, making use of the usable past to inform the present and a deliberate process of liberating oneself from the biased past.

Literature confirms that although both Zimbabwe and South Africa have attained political independence, the university curriculum is still predominantly guided by Eurocentric philosophies and continues to impart Eurocentric values and knowledges to African students at the expense of African epistemologies (Masaka, 2016, Kaya & Seleti, 2013). The continuation of colonial legacies in African universities has prompted some scholars to ask if the universities we have in Africa are actually “African universities or merely universities in Africa?” (Langa in Paterson & Luescher, 2022; Kamola in Hungwe & Mkhize, 2022). The colonial education system which established universities and other institutions of learning in Zimbabwe and South Africa had the agenda of colonising the Black people and stripping them of their Africanness and ways of knowing. They achieved this by denigrating the African cultures and values while making Eurocentric education and values appear superior and universal. The colonial system succeeded in making African education seem outdated, baseless and unguided. Anything that could not be scientifically proven was not regarded as valuable knowledge and this meant that African knowledge had no place in the colonial African university. This Eurocentric approach almost completely destroyed African knowledge, epistemologies and identity. Indeed, the Eurocentric approach succeeded in submerging African knowledge and values to such a level that they could not be recognised (not without having to dig down or search for what is valuable amidst what has been thrown away). McCarthy (2004) highlights that the education provided in African academic and research institutions was and is still not meant to address the intellectual and research needs of the African people, but are designed to support economic exploitation of natural resources. Lebukeng, Manthiba and Dalindjebo (2006) note that African intellectuals in their teaching continue to be enslaved to the preoccupied benchmarks of the dominant Western scholarship and its methodological paradigms. The curricula continue to be a source of alienation as they do not speak to the experiences of learners nor do they reflect the philosophical and social realities of their communities. In view of the persistent nature of coloniality even after independence, most higher education institutions in Africa have undergone various transformations after independence. Universities in Zimbabwe have tried to reform their curriculum in the quest for relevance (Kanyongo, 2005; Munikwa & Mapara, 2022). Some of the reforms include: increasing access to higher education, a focus on vocational training and the recent focus on decolonising and Africanising the curriculum which led to the introduction of indigenous languages like, Sotho and Tonga in teacher training programmes, the crafting of the Heritage-Based curriculum, Education 5.0 and the adoption of the Unhu/Ubuntu philosophy. However, various impediments have been highlighted as working against the success of these renovations (Munikwa & Mapara, 2022). Likewise, South African higher education has also undergone various curriculum reforms from 1990 up to the present (Lange, 2017). These include a focus on access and democratisation which led to the ascendancy of the NQF-from 1990 to 2001, the preoccupation with teaching and learning/through put and efficiency-2001-2016, and the recent focus on decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum starting with students protests in 2015. However, Kasturi (2019) observes how post-independence South African higher education has prioritised demographic and structural changes at the expense of addressing epistemological and ontological aspects of the curriculum. Makaye (2023) argues that the decolonisation and Africanisation of the university curriculum should appeal to the major elements of the curriculum, namely; purpose, content, methodology and evaluation or assessment. Without this, it is futile and superficial. The elements are aligned and related.

The current study thus aims to explore the experiences of Zimbabwean and South African lecturers of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. The two countries share similar colonial history and cultural background albeit different political-economic development. The renewed call to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum comes at a time when universities are still struggling to find their feet after the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the main question to be answered in this study is: What are the lecturers’ experiences of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum in Zimbabwe and South Africa? To explore the issue further the following sub-questions were crafted:

1. Which steps have been taken by universities in Zimbabwe and South Africa to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum?

2. What are South African and Zimbabwean university lecturers' perceptions regarding the decolonization and Africanization of the curriculum?
3. How are the lecturers grappling with decolonising and Africanising the curriculum in Zimbabwe and South Africa?
4. How can the strategies for decolonising and Africanizing the curriculum in South Africa and Zimbabwe be improved?

## **Theoretical framework**

The study was informed by the decolonial approach which entails challenging the socio-political norms of society, specifically in a context like that of former colonies where the racialized subjectivities instituted by colonial discourses and structures continue to be reproduced in education institutions (Khumalo, 2020). It concerns itself with the idea of remaking the world such that the colonised and exploited people gain their ontological density, voices and knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). The choice of decolonial approach as a theoretical framework was based on its merit of helping researchers to recognise that the continuation of colonial legacies is not merely epistemological but it is also structural and normative (Istratil, 2019). The approach assisted the researchers to approach research with an open mind so that they don't perpetuate coloniality. The theory also enables researchers to recognise some structures and norms that perpetuate it. Moreover, it reminds scholars that many assumptions about knowledge, truth and rationality are drawn from literature and practice developed at a particular time and place and through unequal and unjust knowledge and power relations (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Therefore, this theory reminded the researchers to be critical about their sources of information bearing in mind the agenda behind colonial writings.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conceptualisation of decolonisation and Africanisation**

Decolonising the curriculum is often understood as the process by which we rethink, reframe and reconstruct the curriculum and research that preserves a Euro-centred colonial lens. According to Hungwe and Mkhize (2022) decolonising the curriculum has four perspectives which are: decolonisation as re-centring, decolonisation as de-centring, decolonisation as unboxing knowledge and decolonisation as facilitation of access to powerful knowledge. Decolonisation as re-centring calls for a repositioning and re-centring of that which is sacred, indigenous and home-grown-making marginalised knowledges central. Decolonisation as de-centring is actuated by a desire to obliterate the hegemonic sway of Western knowledges to ensure parity and equality of knowledges (Le Grange, 2016). This study will adopt the first two perspectives; that is, decolonisation as re-centring and decolonisation de-centring in order to persuade curriculum developers and academics to give African knowledges an equal status with other epistemologies in research and the curriculum while keeping abreast with global trends.

The concept Africanisation remains contested and entangled in conceptual and practical complexities (Cross & Ndofirepi, 2016). Africanisation is viewed as a part of the decolonisation agenda (Hungwe & Mkhize, 2022) and its proponents uphold the perspective that teaching and learning draw relevance by incorporating local knowledge traditions. Whereas decolonisation can be universalised/ generalised to all nations which were once colonised, Africanisation cannot, it is very specific/particular to African nations and relates to the roots of being African which are linked to African culture. The discourse of Africanisation is highly determined by specific historical, evolving political, social and material circumstances (Assie-Lumumba, 2016). It endeavours to bring on board relevant knowledges for the specific challenges and needs facing Africa. As such it is seen as a problem-centred approach. Africanisation does not end with the epistemic injustices done to African states, but goes on to offer suggestions to the challenges which came about as a result of colonisation, colonialism and coloniality. Among other things, Africanisation calls for a linguistic balance in the medium of instruction, a curriculum that reflects African realities and prioritisation of African people's aspirations (Hungwe & Mkhize, 2022).

## **Lecturers' perceptions of decolonisation and Africanisation**

In a study carried out by Hungwe and Mkhize (2022), scholars regarded colonialism in university curricula as important and all universities wanted to increase the share of African texts in their reading texts. However, Hungwe and Mkhize (2022) noted that they are perceptions that Africanisation may compromise the standard of education, the quality of lecturing staff and research and the general deterioration of infrastructure. Africanisation is regarded as anachronistic and confrontational to global dimensions of knowledge. In a study in South Africa Langa (2022) established that the decolonial project valorised indigenous knowledge, was anti-universal- and thus inimical to the idea of the university.

## **Lecturers' experiences of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum**

In the aftermath of the 2015 student uprising in South Africa, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi (2016) conceptualised the aim of decolonisation as de-centering what is now Eurocentric and replacing universality with pluriversality. The study revealed that students favoured international content and that curriculum reform was often hampered by the university's internal bureaucracy. It was also revealed that funding for research was another critical stumbling block to decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. Although governments had expanded the university network and increased student intake, it was shown that they are still heavily leaned on Eurocentric ideologies. The publication culture was described as difficult leading to frustration and burn-out since publication channels are controlled from the West. For scholars, the most problematic colonial implications for their work was in the demand of quality, relevance and marketization of their teaching which means that faculty should show interdisciplinary-peer reviewed excellence (Laakso & Adu, 2023)

Another study by Pillay and Swanepoel (2019) explored higher education teachers' experiences of decolonising the Bachelor of Education Honours curriculum at a South African university. The study revealed that lecturers lacked the means to engage with a solely Afrocentric curriculum theoretical basis and that Western discourse remained a prominent source of knowledge due to lack of indigenous knowledge systems and research.

Munikwa and Mapara's (2022) also explored how Zimbabwean lecturers in Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) were grappling with the Heritage based Education 5.0 curriculum. The main findings of this study were that CUT academics depicted a sound appreciation of the Education 5.0 doctrine. However, it was also revealed that the process of curriculum development was characterised by lack of expertise in curriculum revision activities, superficial understanding of the Education 5.0 doctrine, limited stakeholder consultation, inadequate capacitation of lecturers and limited time given to the exercise.

## **Rationale for decolonising and Africanising the curriculum**

The presupposition is that an un-Africanised university is foreign, dislocated from and alien to the African culture (Hungwe & Mkhize, 2022). Africanisation is driven by Afro-centric values / principles like humanity (ubuntu/unhu). The concept ubuntu is all-embracing and does not segregate people on grounds of race / tribe. It advocates for respect, love and acceptance and therefore a curriculum built on such a notion will not relegate other epistemologies to the terraces but rather, it will embrace diversity while celebrating uniqueness and togetherness. The epistemic latent hostility between Eurocentric epistemologies and African paradigms raises issues of epistemic justice and politics of knowledge. For the African university to be fully authentic, it should be rooted in the intellectual foundations of African culture and experience through a decolonial process. Masenya (2021) reiterates that a reconceptualised curriculum allows education to address pertinent issues in the life of learners as it responds to the ecological, economic, social, health and theological needs of communities. By adopting both a re-centring and de-centring perspective to decolonisation in this study, the study opens up possibilities for the university curriculum to address both the local needs while at the same time catering for diversity and the inclusion of other epistemologies.

## **Decolonisation and Africanisation versus internationalisation and globalisation**

The imperatives of internationalisation and that of Africanisation are often portrayed in research and in the literature as diverged positions. The belief is that the more you Africanise the less you can internationalise.



There is a perception among many African scholars that in Africanising one has forsaken the pursuit of real intellectual activity and or knowledge in as much as these are perceived and determined by international standards (Crossman, 2004). Moreover, Langa in Paterson and Luescher (2022) notes that in the context of negotiating the nature of an African university within the globally- interconnected world, there has been a broad failure to produce more differentiated provision of higher education structured to meet the wide-ranging needs of the various African societies across the continent. Letseka (2018) avers that African higher education institutions are increasingly becoming defined by internationalisation. The proponents of internationalisation argue that it brings with it, opportunities and benefits and great prospects of prosperity to the marginalised regions. Neale-Shutte and Fourie (2006) contend that in order to be participants in internationalisation, African universities need to create their own identities and develop their own fortes.

This study extends previous studies by cross-referencing the experiences of lecturers in Zimbabwe and South Africa as they implement the decolonised and Africanised curriculum in the Post-Covid-19 period.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the constructivist paradigm whose central endeavor is to understand the subjective world of human experiences where individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The qualitative approach with a phenomenological design enabled the collection of rich and diverse data on lecturers' experiences of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. The targeted population of this study consisted of all university lecturers in Zimbabwe and South Africa. However, considering that the researchers chose a qualitative study only ten university lecturers were purposively selected from five universities. Three universities were located in Zimbabwe while two were in South Africa. Two lecturers were chosen from each of the universities. The participants were drawn from the department of education, curriculum studies and teacher education. The selection of a small number of participants was to enable the researchers to make a thorough follow-up on each participant. Permission was sought from the participants to participate in the study. Introductory letters were sent to participants via WhatsApp and emails. Semi-structured interviews administered personally and via WhatsApp were used to gather rich data. We sought the participants' consent and all ethical issues particularly, informed consent, the right to anonymity and confidentiality. The participants were assured that all videos and WhatsApp texts were to be deleted after the study and were to be used only for that purpose. Data analysis was done in a series of steps which included the following: raw data in the form of WhatsApp messages audios were transcribed and organised thematically. Thereafter, the researchers read through the data to make sense of the information. Data were then coded, organized and textually analysed separately. Responses from lecturers in Zimbabwe and South Africa were triangulated in order to find convergences and divergences. Comparing and contrasting the experiences of lecturers in Zimbabwe and those in South Africa helped to strengthen the results of the study and to present a united voice from the implementers of decolonisation and Africanisation. For credibility and confirmability of results, participants were given the opportunity to check on their captured responses. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality pseudonyms were used wherever names were needed. This includes names of institutions.

## FINDINGS

The findings were presented under the following themes : steps taken by the university to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum; lecturers' views and perceptions about decolonising and Africanising the curriculum; lecturers' experiences of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum; strategies to be adopted to enhance successful decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum.

### Steps taken to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum

The study revealed that most universities in Zimbabwe and South Africa had responded to some extent to the call to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum. The following responses testify this:

Participant A;

I am a communication design lecturer in the design and studio art department in the faculty of Humanities. To Africanise the curriculum I give students projects that are based on the South African context. We have a

project that every term focuses on a different theme. The recent one is POP Art in South Africa. Students need to research POP Art but what must be challenged is that the articles on POP Art are of Western culture. Then I challenged my students to research South African or African artists who do POP Art and there was scanty information on that. This resulted in students searching on social media platforms because on the websites it is only White South African artists. Students managed to get three artists and they chose one that I could approve to mimic their style of illustration.

Participant B;

Considering the buzz of the word, not much really has been done on the ground to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum. So much has been said in conferences, symposiums and even meetings on the subject of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum, but the talks have not translated to real action. There is need for universities in Africa to move from rhetoric talk of the decolonisation and African narrative to walking the talk. Yes, the aims of the syllabus are very clear and some content has been added into the syllabus, for example, on indigenous knowledge systems but the teaching strategies and assessment techniques have remained the same.

Participant C;

Some efforts have been made to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum. Of particular importance was the crafting of the Heritage -based Education 5.0 curriculum which emphasises the use of locally available resources to move industry and commerce. Another notable achievement has been the introduction of indigenous languages (Nambiya, Sesotho; Kalanga) in teacher training programmes. The adoption of the unhu/ubuntu philosophy as the guiding principle symbolises a significant turn towards the African culture which values respect, love and togetherness.

Participant D;

The call to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum which was escalated by the ‘#Rhodes must fall’ campaign and subsequent students protest has stirred universities to revisit the inherited colonial education structures and curriculum which continued to alienate African students, decades after the attainment of political independence in South Africa. I might not have much as I am still to understand their system but I understand that there are some efforts to attend to the curriculum in an inclusive manner given that they call themselves a rainbow nation. They have what they call decolonial and social justice agenda which is meant to unpack entrenched Apartheid curricular injustices and imbalances. Consequent upon this, there has been addition of African literature and historical narratives written by African writers in the curriculum and a shift towards community-based research leading to the incorporation of local perspectives and the voices of African people in various texts.

The majority of responses pointed to the fact that most universities had taken steps to decolonise the curriculum although some respondents rated the steps as insignificant when compared to the various calls to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum. This was supported by one participant, D who intimated:

...As much as the call to Africanise is made...most private universities still perpetuate the colonial curriculum which is antithesis to the call. They [private universities] still have the remnants of apartheid and segregate and/ discriminate against the black African. It's a toll order to Africanise, I tell you!

### **Lecturers' perceptions and views about decolonising and Africanising the curriculum**

Participants were asked to air their views and perceptions about decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. Below are some of the captured responses;

Participant C

This is just one of the many innovations that have come and died a natural death. Decolonising and Africanising the curriculum is easier said than done. To me they contradict what we have been aiming towards

all these years-to be a world-class institution with international recognition. How can we talk about globalisation and internationalisation while at the same time aim to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum? Are we not confusing ourselves and our learners?

Participant A had this to say;

I foresee a situation in which decolonising and Africanising the curriculum will lower the standard of education in African universities. The so-called locally-relevant curriculum will isolate our universities from the rest of the world and further alienate our students from participating globally. Moreover, our universities do not have the capacity to handle such an innovation. Imagine, we have been operating with limited resources like textbooks ever since the inception of the university and I don't think it will be possible now and in the near future for universities to supply their lecturers with resources necessary for a decolonised and Africanised curriculum.

Contrary to the above responses, participant E, reiterated that;

I am open to innovation at all times and I like transformation and learning new things but it differs from lecturer to lecturer. For me transformation should be demand-driven. Economic and social needs of our societies call for home-grown solutions. In searching for these solutions, we then need to go international for knowledge and skills development. This would mean that our curricular is dictated to by our societal needs and aspirations. Our scholars and scientists would need to develop educational materials that speak to local economies for relevance. One example I can think of is the development of Marine Studies programme at Ghetto University in response to the marine occupations in the Eastern Cape. The programme is now offered at Technical Vocational ET colleges in the Western Cape, with other provinces gearing to introduce the module. Decolonising and Africanising the curriculum have the potential to enable Africans to achieve their goal of having an African university. Africans have been living under the shadow of coloniality for a very long time and universities have been blamed for reproducing the colonial structures by offering a curriculum which did not address the needs of African people. Now is the time to turn these Western-centered universities into African universities and to achieve this, a decolonised and Africanised curriculum is indeed required.

The contradicting views are an eye-opener that decolonising and Africanising the curriculum are perceived differently by individuals and this may affect how they implement the curriculum.

### **Experiences of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum**

Zimbabwean and South African lecturers had similar experiences of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. Although a few participants reported that they had positive experiences, many obstacles were reported by lecturers from both countries. These included: non-alignment of assessment techniques to the decolonised and Africanised curriculum; dependency on Western institutions for funding and fellowship positions; globalisation and internationalisation; persistence of Western canons; lack of institutional/administration support; lack of clarity on how to decolonise and Africanise; influence of the hidden curriculum. The following responses were captured from participants:

Participant D;

Decolonising and Africanising the curriculum has made me grow professionally. It has provided an opportunity for research and breaking new ground. I have been provided with the opportunity to be critical, analytical and to think outside the box. For a very long time I used to worship and follow blindly the Western canons, but not anymore. Now I am critical of my sources of information and I constantly evaluate myself as to whether or not I am the one perpetuating colonialism in the way I teach my students. Currently, I am working on a book on African indigenous worldviews.

Participant F;

Old as I am, how am I expected to comprehend debatable concepts such as decolonisation and Africanisation and let alone incorporate them in my teaching. As a graduate student, I learnt about the great philosophers like

John Dewey and Paul Freire and how am I expected to unlearn that and start internalising decolonisation and Africanisation. This whole notion of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum has greatly affected my professional life. I have been deskilled and robbed of my professional integrity.

Participant C postulated that:

Decolonising and Africanising the curriculum is compounded by a lot of factors which work against its success. For example, the persistence of Western canons is a major obstacle. Considering that the majority of textbooks used in universities were written by the British and Americans it becomes difficult to divert from their teachings. One way or the other, as you teach your students, you find yourself referring to the same western canons. For example, it is difficult to Africanise Shakespeare, ... Moreover, although African content has been incorporated into the curriculum, it is not easy to assess students on such aspects as Ubuntu/Botho.

Participant B highlighted that

The fact that decolonisation and Africanisation are viewed as threats to globalisation and internationalisation makes it unacceptable to some people and this non-acceptance leads to reluctance in decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. The fact that African universities still depend heavily on Western institutions for funding and fellowship opportunities makes it difficult for African universities to wean themselves from the West. To a larger extent, African universities receiving funding from the West are obliged to do as their sponsors demand. This means that Western institutions still dictate what and how African universities should teach and assess their students.

Participant G

Another obstacle to decolonising and Africanising the curriculum is the issue of publication. It is true that most publishing companies are run by the West and as such there are the ones who lay down the criteria for assessing the suitability of the content and methodology of a paper to be published. By so doing they compel African writers to write what the Western publishers want and surely this cannot be any stuff on decolonisation and Africanisation. Consequently, it is difficult for lecturers to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum.

Participant H

In trying to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum, the hidden curriculum takes its toll. Our students are exposed to the global trends through technology via social media. What we teach them in lecture theatres about decolonisation and Africanisation is the opposite of what they learn from social media. From an early age, the students have been mostly exposed to a Eurocentric way of life, values and epistemologies and they have somehow accepted and internalised these. This poses a challenge to the lecturer who should prove the worth of a decolonised and Africanised curriculum to students most of who are aspiring to go and study abroad.

Participant I

The concepts decolonisation and Africanisation are heavily contested and debated. Such lack of clarity on the concepts themselves makes it difficult to apply them practically. Moreover, lack of supportive frameworks is hindering the implementation of decolonisation and Africanisation initiatives by university lecturers. There is also a general tendency by lecturers, especially the elderly ones to want to emulate their great teachers. They can even recite with precision what their great teachers used to say. This makes it difficult for such lecturers to embrace change and adopt new teaching strategies

### **Suggestions on strategies to improve the decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum**

The following were identified by participants as strategies to enhance the successful implementation of decolonisation and Africanisation in the curriculum: striking a balance between local and international content; supporting and encouraging academics to write textbooks which reflect the African people's values and developmental needs; decolonising and Africanising the curriculum gradually and offering institutional support to lecturers.



Participant F opined that;

Success in Africanising the curriculum should be bench-marked against international models such as the Nordic countries, Asia, Europe whose curricular evolved after World War 2. Moreover, universities should strike a balance between local and international content. This would enable universities to meet the needs of the local community while at the same time meeting international standards. We live in a global village and there is no way universities can exist in isolation from the rest of the world but this does not mean that African universities should ignore African epistemologies and values in favour of Eurocentric ones. The idea is to incorporate as many epistemologies into the curriculum as we can in order to cater for diversity and inclusivity.

Participant J

Its high time African academics should value their culture and knowledge. This calls for a change in the way African people (both academics and students) perceive African indigenous knowledge because without such transformation it may be impossible to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum. Before even thinking about decolonising and Africanising the curriculum lets first decolonise our minds. University curriculum should infuse Indigenous Knowledge Systems, multilingual strategies and celebrate African ways of representing knowledge within disciplines.

Participant E

Decolonising and Africanising the curriculum is a process not an event. Therefore, African countries must not fast-track this innovation, rather the implementation of such an innovation should be done gradually considering that African universities exist under different political, social and economic contexts. Moreover, these institutions have different foci and therefore there is no one size-fit all solution for the challenges of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. I believe that if universities work to the strength of their relative geographic locations, then we can say we have Africanised our education system. For example, Kwazulu-Natal-tourism/shipping/Agriculture, Free State-Agriculture/mining/hospitals and Eastern Cape-shipping/manufacturing/tourism.

Participant D

The administration should offer support to lecturers as they grapple with decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. Both moral and technical support are required because without these lecturers are likely to experience demotivation. Financial support will help African universities to stand on their own instead of relying on international institutions and organisations for support. Moreover, lecturers should be re-skilled through workshops and seminars to enable them to deal with changes in the curriculum.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section discusses findings related to lecturers' experiences of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The discussion will be done thematically.

### Steps taken by the university to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum

Findings revealed that although to varying degrees, universities in Zimbabwe and South Africa had taken certain steps towards decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. The steps taken included: the introduction of indigenous languages in teaching programmes, the adoption of the Unhu/Ubuntu philosophy, introduction of education 5.0 which is guided by the heritage-based philosophy, increasing African literature, adopting a decolonial and social justice agenda and development of local driven programmes such as marine studies among others. The results confirm Assie-Lumumba's (2016) view that Africanisation of the curriculum should be specific to the country/institution under consideration and be guided by contextual factors. We noted that both countries took different routes relevant to their needs. Zimbabwe is focusing on research, innovation and industrialisation based on its endowed resources, through its Heritage based philosophy. South Africa on the

other hand has focused on more relevant programmes such as Marine studies and tourism because of their geographical location. However, one of the participants opined that the changes were insignificant, particularly in Zimbabwe as assessment strategies remained the same. The above observation concurs with Hungwe and Mkhize's (2022) findings that universities still exist as disseminators of Western-centric teaching and learning. The above scenario poses a challenge to lecturers who end up being caught up in between what/how they have been teaching and what/how they are supposed to be teaching now. This state of indecisiveness by lecturers is caused by lack of clarity on the strategies to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum. Effective curriculum implementation should witness the alignment of the elements of the curriculum (Makaye, 2023). The philosophy of the curriculum should be in sync with the content, the methodology and the assessment techniques.

### **Lecturers' perceptions and views about decolonising and Africanising the curriculum**

Participants had different views and perceptions about decolonising and Africanising the curriculum, some of which were negative. Some participants felt that decolonisation and Africanisation contradicted their efforts to achieve globalisation and internationalisation. They perceived that decolonising and Africanising the curriculum would lower the standard of education in universities and disadvantage students from participating in the global village. The negative perceptions were mainly associated with the anticipated challenges that could arise as a result of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. However, some participants were positive about decolonising and Africanising the curriculum and they saw this as an opportunity to achieve African people's dream of having an African university. They viewed decolonisation and Africanisation as a chance of bringing African epistemologies to the centre and redressing the colonial injustices which had continued to prevail in the African university curriculum even after the attainment of political independence. The positive views and perceptions were associated with the value attached to decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum and were prevalent in junior lecturers compared to their senior counterparts. The views concur with Davis's (1989) technology acceptance model which states that the perceived usefulness of an innovation increases its level of acceptance. We however, thought the Africanisation agenda should strike a balance between the needs of the African and the need for the preservation of the sanctity of the human african. Education should not rob us of our *Unhu/Ubuntu*. That's define our africaneness - *'I am because you are; and you are because I am.'*

### **Lecturers' experiences of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum**

Generally, how lecturers experienced decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum was to a greater extent influenced by the perceptions they held and the challenges they faced. Most responses showed that most lecturers in Zimbabwe and South Africa had mixed experiences of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum.

On a positive note, lecturers revealed that the decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum had resulted in professional growth, particularly to junior lecturers. They highlighted that decolonising and Africanising the curriculum had afforded them an opportunity to be critical and reflective of their day to day teaching.

Conversely, senior lecturers felt that decolonising and Africanising the curriculum had impacted negatively on their professional life and experiences. They were afraid of losing their professional integrity. They indicated that it was difficult on their part to unlearn what they had learnt from their great teachers during their years of training and start teaching new concepts using new methodologies was a struggle. This view supports Fullan's (2011) theory of change which states that change can be unsettling and deskilling, particularly to the elderly.

Moreover, a number of obstacles were highlighted as working against the successful decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum and hence contributing to negative experiences by lecturers. The challenges included: negative perceptions about decolonisation and Africanisation, dependency on Western institutions for publication, funding and fellowship opportunities, the threat of globalisation, persistence of Western canons, effect of the hidden curriculum, lack of clear guidelines on how to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum, lack of administration support and the challenge of assessing students in a decolonised and

Africanised curriculum. All the sampled universities experienced almost the same challenges and this shows that the path to decolonising and Africanising the curriculum is not an easy one for most African universities.

The challenges highlighted in this study are not unique but have been reported by several other studies. For example, Ree (2002) reported that Western canons are characterised by historical inertia. He noted that although canons can be changed, replaced or reformed, they have a characteristically inherently conservative nature and to that extent they are imbued with a certain degree of historical inertia. Moreover, the findings regarding negative perceptions by lecturers confirm Nyoni's (2019) findings that a caged colonial mentality restricts African mental power from functioning critically outside the box in accommodating African indigenised contexts.

The negative experiences reported in this study resulted in lecturers feeling demotivated, deskilled and overwhelmed. Such experiences have a negative impact on the successful implementation of any curriculum innovation project. To make matters worse, lack of support by the administration made the process burdensome and daunting to lecturers. However, for those lecturers who had positive perceptions about decolonising and Africanising the curriculum, their experiences were more fulfilling as they added to their professional growth. Despite some challenges, they were prepared to take the battle to the next level. The results showed that unpleasant experiences were common among senior lecturers as compared to their junior counterparts. This might be an indication that the younger staff accept change more readily than older staff.

### **Strategies to decolonise and Africanise the curriculum**

Most participants suggested that university authorities should consider the views and address the concerns of lecturers who are the key players in implementing the decolonised and Africanised curriculum. Moreover, professional development was cited as an important strategy in the successful implementation of a decolonised and Africanised curriculum because it equips lecturers with skills to deal with the task of implementing curriculum. This supports Fataar (2018) who reiterates that implementing a decolonised curriculum requires educators to undergo development and training to develop a deeper understanding of the principles and goals of decolonised education. This sensitises and capacitates implementers of the new innovation.

Furthermore, the study highlighted that university administration should support lecturers morally and financially to ensure lecturers do not experience challenges. Supporting lecturers during the implementation of a curriculum innovation is important because it boosts their morale and helps them to face challenges head-on. Another strategy was that universities should strike a balance between local and international content. This will ensure that the university curriculum caters for the needs of the local people while at the same time thriving to meet international standards. This could be possible if universities in Africa adopt more than one perspective of decolonisation, for example, decolonisation as re-centring and decolonisation as de-centring. This supports Chikoko (2016) who warns that those who are spearheading the struggle for Africanisation should not be too individualistic and forget that Africa belongs to the world and hence should be connected to it for it to be functional. Moreover, the study revealed that academics should be encouraged and supported to write textbooks which reflect African peoples' values to prevent over-reliance on Western canons which idolise Eurocentric epistemologies and values. Also, participants suggested that the process of decolonising and Africanising the curriculum should be done gradually and the process should be closely monitored and constantly evaluated to see if it is yielding the required results. The above suggestions show that it is pertinent that African leaders and university authorities work tirelessly to support lecturers as they grapple with decolonising and Africanising the curriculum. Being the most important players during curriculum implementation, lecturers require an enabling and supportive environment to overcome such obstacles.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

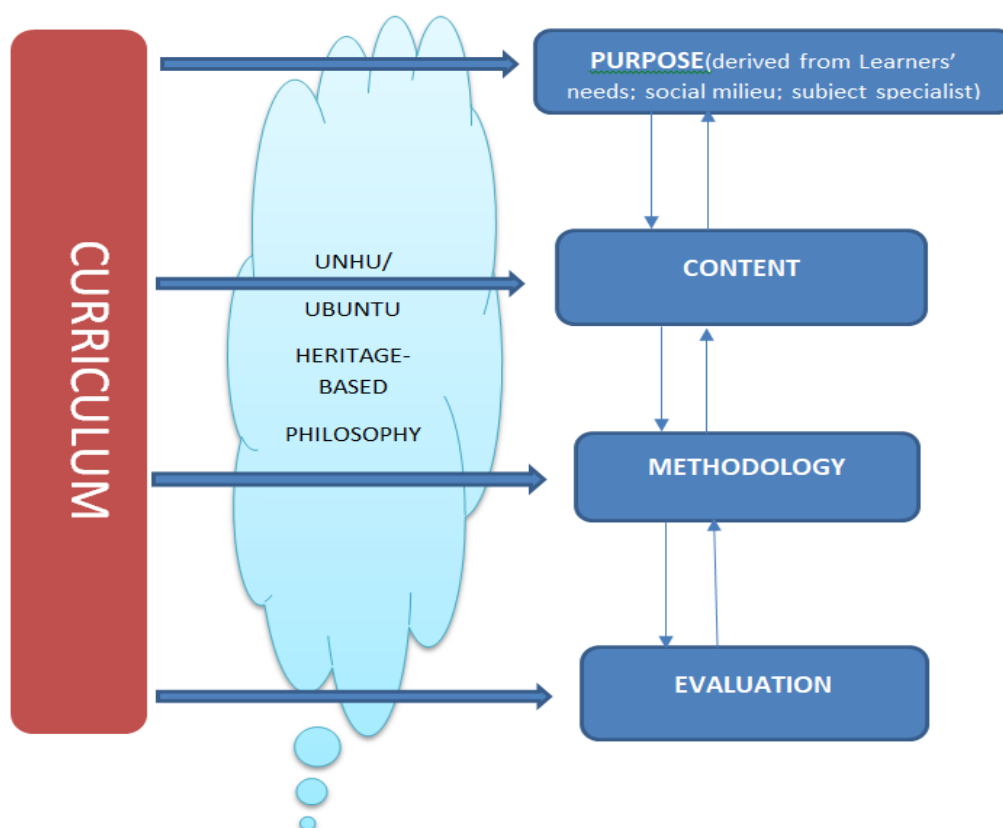
Based on the findings of this study the study concluded that the level of awareness and acceptance of decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum was high among lecturers. Moreover, although the experiences of lecturers regarding decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum were an uphill struggle most of them were determined to forge on because the battle was worth it. Although both Zimbabwe and South

Africa have hidden the call to decolonise and Africanise the university curriculum, their experiences are more or less the same. Both countries are trying to make their curriculum more relevant to their needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that while keeping up with worldly trends, university curriculum should strike a balance between local needs and international needs. This will ensure that the curriculum caters for diversity, inclusivity and sustainability. Moreover, relevant assessment models should be adopted to align with the requirements of a decolonised and Africanised curriculum. In view of the wide coverage of the concepts of decolonisation and Africanisation, the study recommends that universities should customise their curriculum based on the prevailing socio-economic imperatives. The decolonisation and Africanising narrative can only be successful if all the curriculum elements are aligned. This implies that the curriculum content, methodology employed, evaluation and assessment techniques/approaches used should be in sync with the Africanisation call. To this end we propose that institutions can use the Model below if they want to successfully decolonise and Africanise their curricula. Whilst the findings were limited to two countries, they can be transferable to other countries particularly former colonies.

### A MODEL TO DECOLONISE & AFRICANISE THE UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM



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