

The background of the image shows the silhouettes of a group of graduates celebrating. They are holding up their black graduation caps and rolled-up diplomas against a light blue, clear sky. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the graduates, creating a sense of achievement and joy.

Decolonising the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Curriculum at one University of Technology in South Africa

Reflections on the paper published in the South African Journal of Higher
Education



Let's Talk
DECOLONISATION



is
my
curriculum
too white?

Details of the paper

(click on the embedded doc below)

DECOLONISING THE POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM AT ONE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

DECOLONISING THE POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM AT ONE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this theoretical article is to explain efforts at decolonising the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE) curriculum at a university of technology (UoT) in South Africa. The main source of information was collected through relevant secondary data. The cost of continuing with Western knowledge organisation in the PGDHE programme destroys and undervalues African intellectualities, culture and literature, while repressing relational language through proscribed texts. We argue that a clear understanding of decolonisation of the curriculum is necessary, to avoid the risk of implementing changes that will result in superficial alterations, rather than an inclusive curriculum that accentuates African intellectualism. The article recommends that a discourse around decolonisation should be sustained at all levels of the institution in re-thinking and re-evaluating the modules offered in the PGDHE programme to ensure they become more inclusive.

Keywords: decolonisation, curriculum, indigenity, PGDHE programme, university of technology

INTRODUCTION

The PGDHE is a generic programme that is offered in most higher education institutions nationally and globally. The process of deciding on the curriculum content in a programme is

Our research questions were

- What is the decolonisation of the curriculum?
- Why is it important to decolonise the curriculum?
- Which aspects of the curriculum can be decolonised?



What is colonisation?

Colonization is the process by which a country establishes control over a foreign territory, often through the settlement of its people and the exploitation of resources.

Key features of colonization include:

- **Political Control:** Colonizers impose their governance structures, laws, and political systems on the colonised territory.
- **Economic Exploitation:** Colonisers extract resources, labour, and wealth from the colonized regions, often prioritizing the interests of the colonizing power.
- **Cultural Imposition:** Colonisation frequently involves the spread of the colonizer's culture, language, and religion, often at the expense of indigenous cultures.
- **Settlement:** Colonizers may establish settlements in the colonized areas, leading to demographic changes and displacement of local populations.
- **Resistance and Conflict:** Colonization often meets with resistance from indigenous peoples, leading to conflicts, uprisings, and struggles for independence.

Historically, colonization has had profound and lasting impacts on societies, economies, and cultures around the world, contributing to ongoing issues related to identity, inequality, and social justice.

What is decolonisation?

Decolonization refers to the process where colonies gain independence from colonial powers, leading to the establishment of sovereign nations. It involves several key aspects:

- **Political Independence:** Former colonies seek to establish their governments, free from foreign control.
- **Cultural Reclamation:** It often includes efforts to revive and promote indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions that were suppressed during colonization.
- **Economic Autonomy:** Decolonization aims to restructure economies that were previously reliant on colonial powers, promoting self-sufficiency and local development.
- **Social Justice:** The process addresses historical injustices and inequalities created by colonial rule, striving for equity and inclusion in post-colonial societies.
- **International Recognition:** Newly independent nations seek recognition and legitimacy in the international community, often joining global organizations.

Decolonization occurred predominantly in the mid-20th century, particularly after World War II, as many nations in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean gained independence. The process is ongoing, as some regions continue to struggle for autonomy and self-determination.

Roots of decolonization as a theory

Philosophical views	Philosophical statement
Post-structuralism	Thinkers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida challenged established narratives and power structures, emphasizing how knowledge is constructed and how it can perpetuate dominance.
Frantz Fanon	His works, particularly "Black Skin, White Masks" and "The Wretched of the Earth," critically examined the psychological and cultural impacts of colonialism, advocating for liberation and the reclamation of identity
The Situationist International	This group critiqued consumer culture and the alienation of modern life, influencing revolutionary thought and the idea of reclaiming public spaces and identities.
Structuralism	Scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss explored how cultural structures shape human experience, prompting debates about the universality of Western frameworks and the need for alternative perspectives
Anti-colonial Movements	The global wave of anti-colonial struggles during this period, particularly in Africa and Asia, provided practical contexts for philosophical discussions about power, identity, and resistance.
Marxism	Marxist theory, especially in its application to colonial contexts, influenced the understanding of economic exploitation and class struggle, intertwining with decolonial thought.
Indigenous Voices	The emergence of indigenous intellectuals and activists during this time contributed to the critique of colonial narratives and the push for recognition of indigenous knowledge systems.

Other contributors of decolonisation

Contributor	Summary
Walter D. Mignolo	Emphasizes the importance of "decoloniality" as a way to challenge Eurocentrism and promote alternative epistemologies.
Aníbal Quijano	Known for his concept of "coloniality of power". He explores how colonial structures continue to influence social, political, and economic systems even after formal decolonization.
Maria Lugones	A feminist scholar who critiques the intersections of race, gender, and colonialism, advocating for a decolonial feminist perspective.
Eduardo Viveiros de Castro	An anthropologist who promotes the idea of "perspectivism," emphasizing the importance of indigenous knowledge and worldviews.
Ruth Wilson Gilmore	A geographer and activist whose work focuses on social justice, prison abolition, and the impacts of colonialism on contemporary social issues.
Tuck & Yang	Authors of "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," they argue for a clear distinction between decolonization (the return of land to Indigenous peoples) and other forms of social justice.
Linda Tuhiwai Smith	A Māori scholar known for her work on research methodologies that respect and empower Indigenous knowledge systems.
Vishwas Satgar	A South African activist and scholar who explores the links between decoloniality and social movements.

Decolonisation on campus

- To be clear, it's important to distinguish between decolonisation as a movement in the academy and decolonisation as the historical process that led to the end of Europe's empires.
- When academics talk about decolonisation, they are generally not referring to the 20th century's many national liberation movements. They are talking about ridding the institutions in their own countries – usually the university or education system – of Western (aka 'colonial') influences.
- The roots of decolonization as a theory indeed find significant grounding in the philosophical and political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly within the context of French thought. Key influences include:

What is the decolonisation of the curriculum?

Decolonisation of the curriculum refers to the process of critically examining and revising educational content, teaching methods, and institutional practices to address and rectify the legacies of colonialism. It aims to create a more inclusive, equitable, and representative educational experience. Key aspects include:

- Diversifying Content
- Challenging Eurocentrism
- Promoting Critical Thinking
- Inclusive Pedagogy
- Empowering Indigenous Knowledge
- Addressing Social Justice
- Community Engagement

Decolonising the curriculum is an ongoing process aimed at creating a more just and equitable educational framework that acknowledges and addresses the impacts of colonialism on knowledge and learning.

Decolonizing the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education

- Decolonizing the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Curriculum in South Africa involves several key strategies to ensure that the curriculum reflects diverse perspectives, histories, and knowledge systems.
- Here are some approaches to consider



What is the decolonisation of the curriculum?

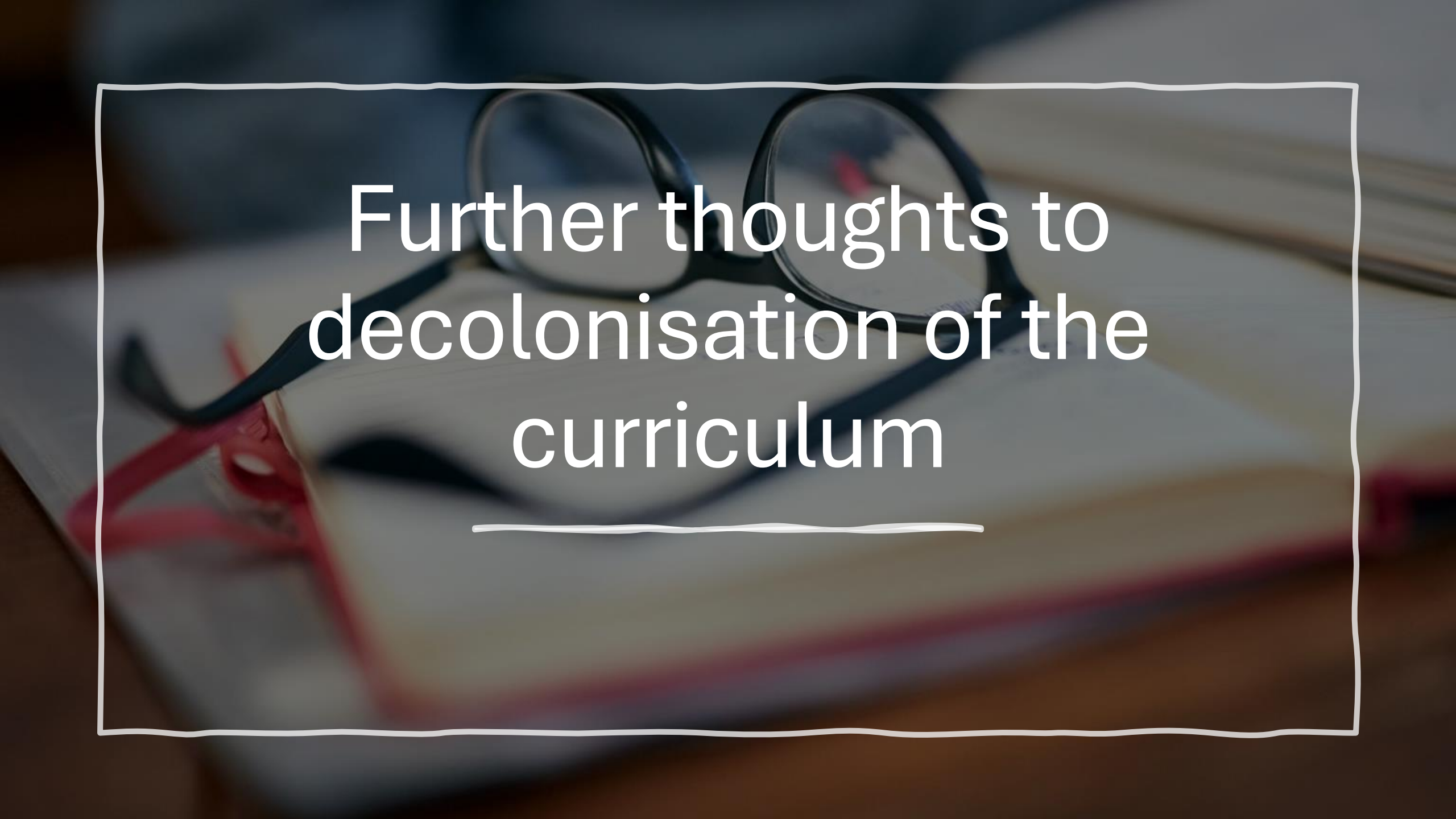
Decolonization of the curriculum frameworks involves rethinking educational structures and content to promote inclusivity, equity, and representation of diverse perspectives. Here are some key components of decolonized curriculum frameworks:

- **Inclusive Content:** Integrate diverse voices, histories, and contributions from marginalized and indigenous communities; Ensure representation of various cultures, genders, and social classes in the curriculum.
- **Critical Pedagogy:** Encourage critical thinking and questioning of dominant narratives and power structures; Foster an environment where students can engage in discussions about social justice, equity, and historical contexts.
- **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:** Adapt teaching methods to be culturally responsive and relevant to students' backgrounds; Incorporate local knowledge and community perspectives into the learning process.
- **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Break down silos between subjects to create a more holistic understanding of issues related to colonialism and its impacts; Encourage connections between history, literature, social sciences, and the arts.
- **Collaborative Curriculum Development:** Involve educators, students, and community members in the curriculum design process to ensure it reflects diverse perspectives and needs; Partner with indigenous and local communities to co-create relevant content.

Decolonisation of the curriculum continued ..

- **Decolonial Assessment:** Develop assessment methods that recognize diverse ways of knowing and learning, moving beyond traditional testing formats; Use formative assessments that allow for reflection and growth rather than solely summative evaluations.
- **Lecturer Training and Support:** Provide professional development for educators on decolonial practices, cultural competency, and inclusive teaching strategies; Foster ongoing dialogue and support networks for teachers engaged in decolonization efforts.
- **Institutional Commitment:** Ensure that educational institutions are committed to decolonization efforts at all levels, from policy to practice; Create frameworks for accountability and continuous improvement in decolonizing initiatives.
- **Focus on Social Justice:** Address systemic inequalities and injustices within the educational system, promoting a curriculum that advocates for social change; Encourage students to become active participants in their communities and global citizens.
- **Reflection and Adaptation:** Continuously reflect on and adapt the curriculum based on feedback, research, and changing societal contexts; Embrace a mindset of learning and growth in the decolonization process.

These frameworks aim to create a more equitable and just educational environment that acknowledges and addresses the legacies of colonialism while empowering all students.

A pair of black-rimmed glasses is positioned over a stack of books. A red bookmark is visible in the foreground. The entire scene is framed by a white, hand-drawn style border.

Further thoughts to decolonisation of the curriculum

Critical Reflection on Curriculum Content

- **Review Existing Materials:** Analyze current course content for Eurocentric biases and identify areas where African perspectives can be integrated.
- **Incorporate Indigenous Knowledge:** Include content that reflects indigenous knowledge systems, practices, and languages.



Inclusive Pedagogical Approaches

- **Collaborative Learning:** Foster collaborative learning environments that encourage dialogue among students from diverse backgrounds.
- **Participatory Methods:** Use teaching methods that allow students to share their experiences and knowledge, promoting a more inclusive classroom.



Diversifying Reading Lists

- **Broaden Sources:** Include texts and resources from African scholars, practitioners, and local contexts to provide a more balanced perspective.
- **Encourage Critical Texts:** Select readings that challenge dominant narratives and encourage critical thinking about power, privilege, and knowledge production.



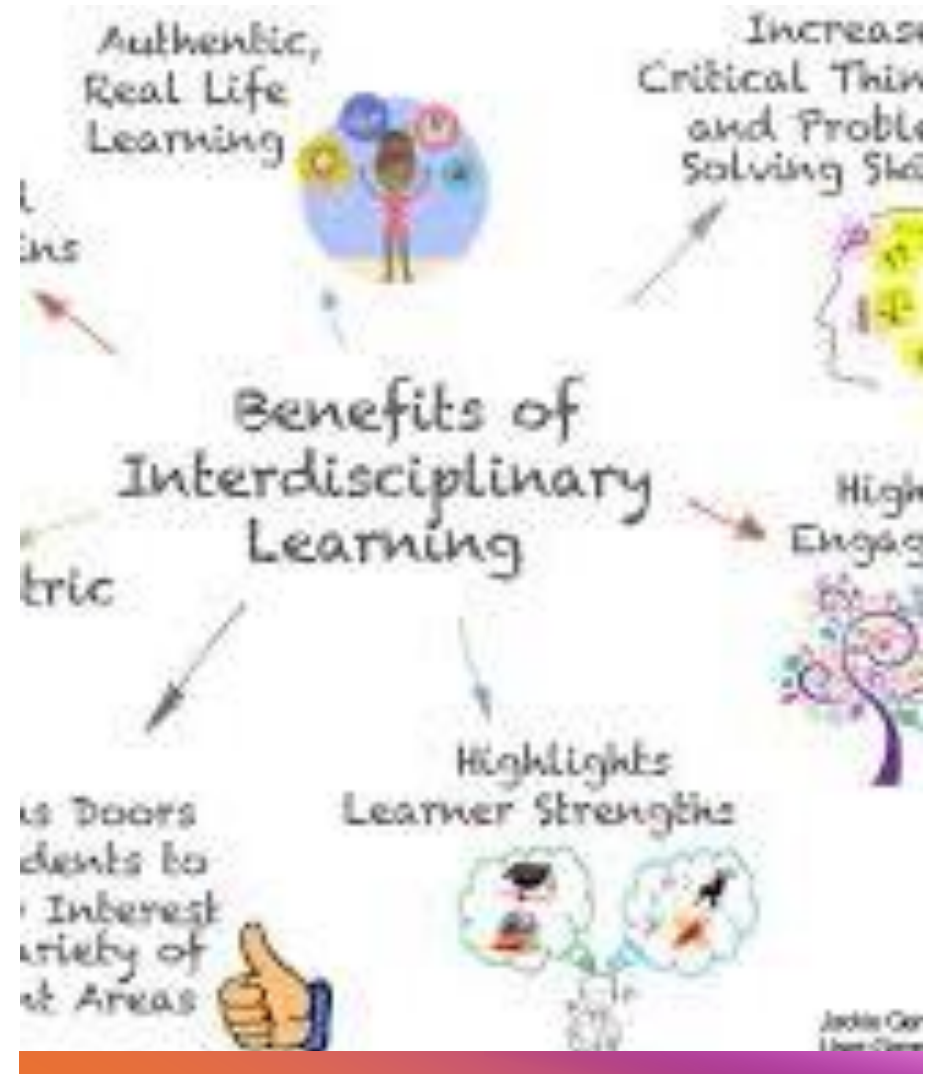
Engaging with Local Contexts

- **Contextual Relevance:** Ensure that course content is relevant to the South African context, addressing local challenges and opportunities in higher education.
- **Community Involvement:** Collaborate with local communities and educational institutions to gain insights and feedback on curriculum relevance.



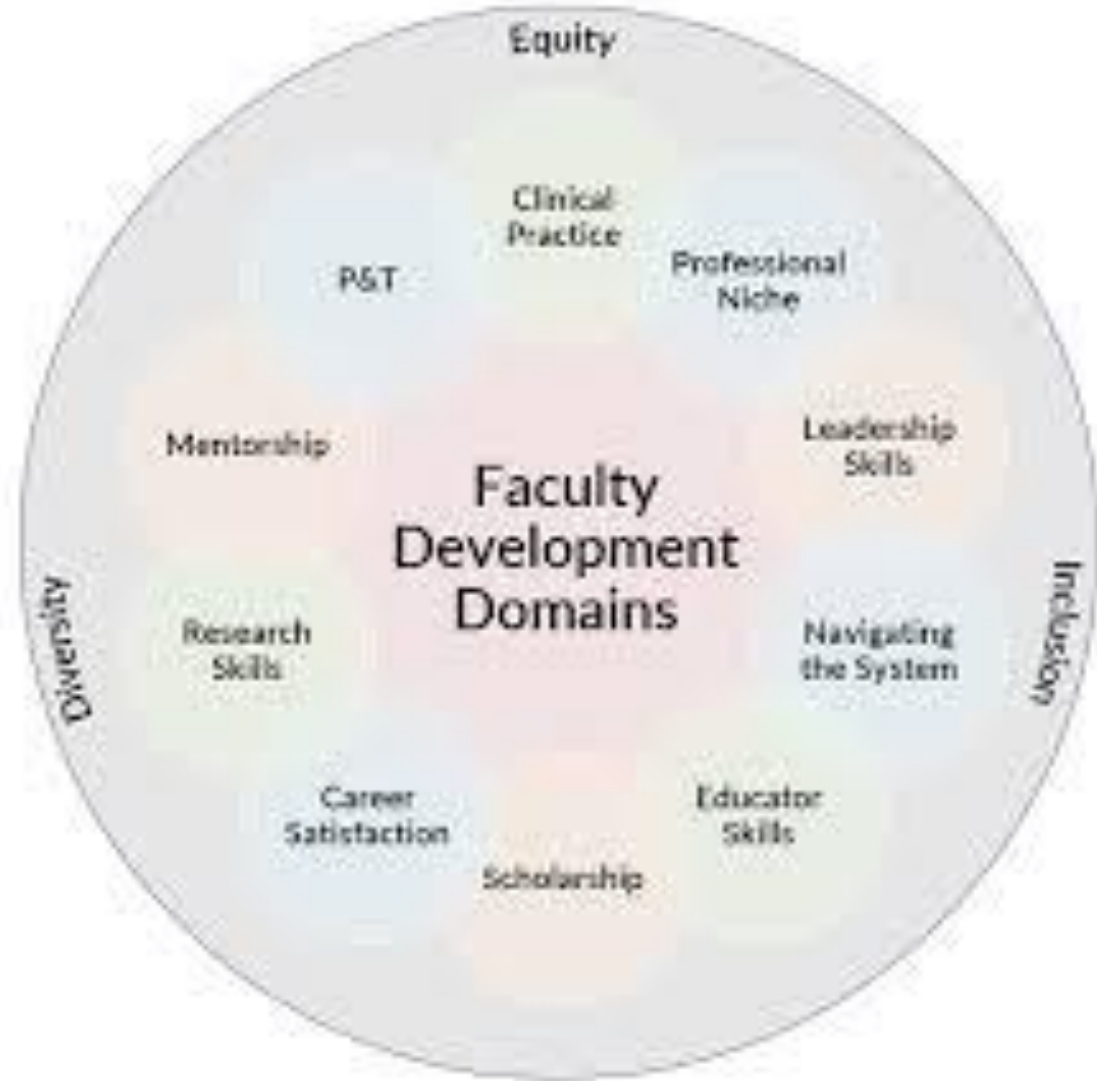
Interdisciplinary Approaches

- **Integrate Disciplines:** Encourage an interdisciplinary approach that draws from various fields, including sociology, history, and cultural studies, to enrich the curriculum.
- **Global Perspectives:** While focusing on local contexts, also engage with global discourses on decolonization and education.



Faculty Development

- **Training for Educators:** Provide professional development opportunities for faculty to understand decolonization and to develop skills in inclusive pedagogy.
- **Encourage Research:** Support faculty research on decolonization in education to inform curriculum development.



Student Involvement

- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Create platforms for student feedback on the curriculum and encourage their involvement in curriculum design.
- **Empower Student Voices:** Facilitate student-led initiatives that promote decolonization and inclusivity within the academic environment.





Continuous Evaluation and Adaptation


- **Regular Reviews:** Implement a system for ongoing review and adaptation of the curriculum based on feedback, research, and changing contexts.
- **Stay Informed:** Keep abreast of global and local developments in decolonization and education to continually refine the curriculum.

Recommendations

- Academics, as key players in the curriculum decolonisation agenda should take a leading role and not wait for institutional cultures and environments to change
- “The process of constructing knowledge needs to be reclaimed and remade as a critical act of opening possibility through developing pedagogies (as method and content) with students”.
- There is a need to continue to revise our curriculum content and teaching methods so that they can become more inclusive and relevant to the African context.

Conclusion

- We argued that South African higher education curricula are still Eurocentric, and that this situation needs to be re-addressed.
- Curricula decolonisation is a significant strategy to address some of the shortcomings in the curriculum, inequalities in the society and past injustices in the higher education arena.
- Our experiences from the study attest to the fact that the agenda to decolonise the curriculum is not an easy process. We are in a dilemma on how much of the curriculum we should decolonise, given that the world has become a big seamless global village and for the marketability of our students internationally. We see profitability in embracing both the decolonisation agenda and internationalisation. On one side, we have a strong desire to decolonise the curriculum and on the other side, we want to internationalise it.
- Concurrently, we seek ways to minimise the downward thread in enrolments that could come as a result of a radical change in the curriculum. We conclude that the process of decolonisation should be system-wide within the institution, guided by an institution-wide framework that provides direction to all stakeholders.
- Decolonizing the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Curriculum in South Africa is an ongoing process that requires commitment, collaboration, and a willingness to challenge existing norms. By implementing these strategies, institutions can create a more equitable and inclusive educational environment that respects and reflects the diversity of South African society.



Questions and answer



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