Towards a Decolonial Approach to Academic Writing in South African Multilingual Universities

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Abstract

Academic writing in South African higher education continues to be shaped by Eurocentric and monolingual English conventions that function as gatekeeping mechanisms, often privileging students who are already familiar with dominant linguistic and rhetorical norms while constraining the participation of those who draw on diverse linguistic repertoires. While pedagogical models such as the study skills, academic socialisation, and academic literacies approaches have advanced writing support, they seldom challenge the coloniality embedded in academic norms. Drawing on decolonial theory, critical pedagogy, and academic literacies scholarship, this conceptual article uses reflective practice from my work as a writing centre practitioner at a multilingual university to propose a decolonial framework for academic writing grounded in three principles: linguistic inclusivity, epistemic plurality, and collaborative knowledge-making. I outline strategies for embedding these principles in curriculum design, assessment reform, and writing centre practice, reconceptualising academic writing as a socially and politically situated practice. Grounded in the South African context but with broader global relevance, the framework seeks to dismantle linguistic hegemony, affirm diverse epistemologies, and foster equitable academic cultures.

Keywords: academic writing; decoloniality; epistemic justice; multilingualism; South Africa

Introduction

As a writing centre practitioner in South African higher education, I have observed that academic writing often determines students' success. Through writing, students demonstrate disciplinary mastery, engage in scholarly dialogue, and position themselves within intellectual communities (Lea and Street 1998; Wingate 2015). Yet these conventions are neither neutral nor equally accessible. In South Africa, as in many postcolonial contexts, they are rooted in Eurocentric traditions that privilege monolingual English expression and Western rhetorical norms (Boughey 2010). Students already familiar with these norms enjoy significant advantages, while those who draw on diverse linguistic and educational repertoires are often positioned as lacking in relation to dominant academic expectations (Clarence 2017; Luckett and Hunma 2014; Nendauni 2025).

This inequity is stark in a multilingual society with 12 official languages and a history of colonial and apartheid-era exclusion (Heugh 2015; Madiba 2014). Although policy commitments promote linguistic diversity (Ministry of Education [MoE] 2002), English remains dominant in instruction, assessment, and publication. Consequently, many students suppress their home languages and cultural identities to conform to academic norms, a form of epistemic exclusion that systematically marginalises certain ways of knowing (Fricker 2007).

Globally recognised pedagogical models, the study skills, academic socialisation, and academic literacies approaches, have influenced academic writing support in South Africa. The study skills model frames writing as a decontextualised technical skill (Wingate 2006); the academic socialisation model inducts students into disciplinary norms without questioning their legitimacy (Lea and Street 1998); and the academic literacies model, though more critical, has seldom confronted the colonial legacies embedded in academic discourse (Janks 2010).

This article responds to this gap by advancing a decolonial approach to academic writing that repositions multilingualism as a central academic resource and challenges the hegemony of English as the sole legitimate medium of scholarly expression. Drawing on decolonial theory, critical pedagogy, and academic literacies scholarship, and grounded in my reflective practice as a writing centre practitioner, I propose a conceptual framework built on three interrelated principles: linguistic inclusivity, epistemic plurality, and collaborative knowledge-making. I outline practical strategies for integrating these principles into curriculum design, assessment reform, and writing centre transformation, contributing both to the South African higher education transformation agenda and to global debates on linguistic justice in multilingual universities.

Methodological Orientation and Positionality

This article is a conceptual study grounded in reflective practice. It integrates theoretical analysis with insights from my sustained professional engagement as a writing centre practitioner and lecturer at a multilingual South African university. Over several years, I have designed, implemented, and refined interventions such as translanguaging workshops, multilingual writing assignments, and collaborative tutor-student sessions that centre students' full linguistic repertoires. My reflections are informed by informal student feedback, collegial discussions, and ongoing critical self-observation.

The work is situated within a decolonial epistemological framework that views academic writing as a socially and politically situated practice, shaped by entrenched hierarchies of language and knowledge. It draws on critical pedagogy's vision of education as a practice of freedom (Freire 1970) and on the academic literacies tradition, which put focus on identity, power, and epistemology in writing (Lea and Street 1998). These commitments inform the decolonial framework I propose and guide the strategies outlined for curriculum, assessment, and writing centre reform.

Through explicitly linking theory and lived professional practice, my approach bridges abstract advocacy for decoloniality with the everyday realities of supporting students in multilingual, postcolonial higher education contexts. However, I acknowledge the limitations of my approach; the absence of systematically collected empirical data means that the claims presented here are not statistically generalisable. The observations are necessarily shaped by my positionality, institutional context, and disciplinary focus. Nevertheless, the conceptual framework is offered as a theoretically strong and contextually grounded model that can be adapted, tested, and refined through future empirical research in diverse higher education settings.

Literature Review

This literature review examines three interrelated bodies of scholarship: dominant models of academic writing pedagogy, decoloniality and its relationship to academic writing, and multilingualism as an asset in higher education. The aim in this section is to critically analyse the strengths and limitations of these bodies of work to identify the conceptual and practical gaps that my proposed framework seeks to address.

Dominant Approaches to Academic Writing

The teaching of academic writing in higher education is often conceptualised through three dominant models: the study skills model, the academic socialisation model, and the academic literacies model (Lea and Street 1998). Each model offers distinct assumptions about the nature of writing and the role of students in acquiring academic discourse, and each has shaped writing pedagogy internationally.

The study skills model treats writing as a set of discrete, transferable technical competences, such as grammar, syntax, and essay structuring, that can be acquired

independently of disciplinary or cultural context (Wingate 2015). While this model addresses important formal features, it tends to position writing as a neutral skill and to frame students from diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds as deficient in the "correct" skills (Boughey 2010).

The academic socialisation model represents a shift towards recognising disciplinary specificity. Its goal is to induct students into the conventions and epistemologies of their chosen fields (Wingate 2015). However, this induction often occurs without interrogating whether those disciplinary norms should themselves be open to critique. As a result, students are encouraged to assimilate into existing academic cultures, which often means adopting Eurocentric epistemologies and language practices that marginalise alternative ways of knowing (Luckett and Hunma 2014).

The academic literacies model, first articulated by Street (1984) and developed by Lea and Street (1998), offers a more critical perspective, framing writing as a social practice embedded in identity, power, and epistemology (Lillis and Scott 2007). While it is more attuned to questions of access and diversity, it has not always explicitly addressed the colonial legacies underpinning academic writing norms in postcolonial settings (Janks 2010). Without a decolonial lens, even this model risks reproducing the hierarchies it seeks to challenge.

Recent South African scholarship has begun to extend academic literacies work by explicitly centring multilingualism and decoloniality within writing pedagogy and writing centre practice. For example, Mhlongo et al. (2023) demonstrate how multilingual engagement in writing consultations can disrupt monolingual academic norms and reposition students' linguistic repertoires as epistemic resources rather than barriers. Similarly, Moore (2025) argues that writing centres should be reconceptualised as sites of institutional transformation rather than remediation, where dominant academic conventions can be critically interrogated and renegotiated through dialogic pedagogies. These emerging perspectives signal a shift towards more transformative understandings of academic writing support that align closely with decolonial aims.

This review stresses the need to move beyond adaptation of existing models towards a fundamental reimagining of academic writing, one that positions multilingualism and diverse epistemologies as legitimate foundations for scholarly expression. This is a central premise of the framework I propose.

Decoloniality and Academic Writing

According to Mignolo (2007) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), higher education in South Africa, and globally, continues to operate within enduring structures of power, knowledge, and being that are rooted in colonial histories. While political colonialism has formally ended, the coloniality of knowledge, the privileging of Western epistemologies, languages, and scholarly practices, remains embedded in academic institutions. Academic writing is one of the primary sites where this coloniality is

reproduced, as students are often required to conform to linguistic and rhetorical norms grounded in European traditions, particularly English.

Language has always been central to the colonial project, functioning historically as a mechanism of both cultural domination and epistemic control (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986). In my own observations of South African universities, the continued dominance of English as the medium of instruction and publication exemplifies a form of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992), despite the presence of official language policies that celebrate the country's multilingual reality. This dominance not only disadvantages students who are more proficient in other languages, but also delegitimises the epistemologies embedded in those languages (Heugh 2015; Madiba 2014).

Drawing from the works of Fricker (2007), I have come to understand that the persistence of monolingual academic writing norms in multilingual contexts constitutes a form of epistemic injustice, whereby certain voices are systematically diminished or excluded. This is not simply a matter of translation or substituting one language for another; it is about the deeper epistemic hierarchies that position some systems of knowledge as inherently more rigorous or legitimate than others (Santos 2016). In enforcing conformity to Western rhetorical forms, academic writing pedagogy often sustains what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) fittingly calls the "cognitive empire", constraining the possibilities for knowledge-making within the university.

Recent scholarship further emphasises that multilingual pedagogies and decoloniality are inseparable from broader projects of epistemic justice in higher education. Namakula, Kimani, and Kadenge (2025) argue that recognising linguistic diversity requires rethinking institutional assumptions about knowledge production, authority, and legitimacy, rather than merely accommodating linguistic difference within existing frameworks. Their work reinforces the need to conceptualise academic writing as a contested epistemic space where power relations are negotiated and potentially transformed.

In advocating for a decolonial approach to academic writing, I seek to resist this epistemic hegemony by affirming linguistic plurality and recognising students' home languages and cultural resources as legitimate and valuable modes of academic engagement (García and Wei 2015). This involves more than simply adding multilingual materials to the curriculum; it demands reimagining writing pedagogy as inherently multilingual and culturally situated. This is a transformative rather than additive endeavour, one that questions the very definitions of academic rigour and authority that have been shaped by colonial histories (Janks 2010; Makalela 2016).

Furthermore, my stance aligns with critical pedagogy's conception of education as a practice of freedom (Freire 1970), in which students are not passive recipients of dominant discourses but active participants in the co-construction of knowledge. Within academic writing, this means creating spaces where students can negotiate, shape, and,

where necessary, resist academic norms rather than simply assimilating into them. The principles of linguistic inclusivity and epistemic plurality in my framework are direct responses to these forms of epistemic injustice, aiming to dismantle linguistic and epistemic hierarchies embedded in academic writing conventions.

Multilingualism as an Asset

I have frequently encountered the tendency to frame multilingualism as a problem to be managed rather than as a resource to be harnessed. This deficit perspective positions students' home languages as barriers to academic success, implicitly equating English proficiency with intellectual competence (Boughey 2010; Heugh 2015). García and Wei (2015) reject this framing because it fails to recognise the cognitive, cultural, and epistemic resources that multilingual students bring into the academy. This implies that a decolonial approach to academic writing requires a fundamental shift.

In alignment with the works of Madiba (2014) and Makalela (2016), through my teaching and research, I have observed how students often draw on their full linguistic repertoires, sometimes consciously, at other times unconsciously, to construct meaning, engage with complex concepts, and participate in scholarly debate (Nendauni 2025). However, prevailing pedagogies frequently discourage or penalise visible multilingual expression in academic writing, which reinforces the hierarchy that places English at the top of the academic value system (Luckett and Hunma 2014). According to Santos (2016), such monolingual bias not only erases the lived linguistic realities of students but also narrows the scope of epistemic possibilities available in academic discourse.

One approach I find particularly promising is translanguaging, which I understand as the deliberate and dynamic use of a speaker's linguistic resources to construct meaning (García and Wei 2015). In academic writing, translanguaging may involve drafting in multiple languages, integrating multilingual terminology into discipline-specific discourse, or engaging with sources across languages to enrich an argument. I have seen, through South African case studies such as multilingual writing support programmes (Madiba 2014; Makalela 2016), how translanguaging can deepen conceptual understanding and affirm students' cultural identities.

In agreement, Mhlongo et al. (2023) show that multilingual consultation practices can enhance students' confidence and engagement by validating their linguistic identities, while Moore (2025) highlights the role of writing centres in fostering dialogic spaces where linguistic diversity is normalised within academic discourse. My own recent research (Nendauni 2025) similarly indicates that affirming students' linguistic repertoires within writing consultations contributes to stronger academic self-efficacy and a greater sense of belonging, reinforcing the argument that multilingual pedagogies have both pedagogical and affective significance.

From a decolonial standpoint, adopting multilingual approaches to academic writing is not simply a matter of inclusion; it is an act of epistemic justice (Fricker 2007). It

actively disrupts the hegemony of English as the sole legitimate medium of academic expression and opens a space where diverse epistemologies can co-exist on equal terms. This vision aligns with the Language Policy for Higher Education (MoE 2002), which calls for the promotion of multilingualism as a means of advancing equity and social cohesion.

I also see multilingual pedagogies as resonating strongly with critical pedagogy's commitment to participatory and inclusive education (Freire 1970). According to Boulton-Lewis et al. (2001), when students are encouraged to write from within their own linguistic and cultural frameworks, they are more likely to view themselves as legitimate producers of knowledge rather than outsiders striving to conform to imposed norms. In my experience, this shift in self-perception can be transformative, enhancing engagement, improving retention, and fostering academic success, particularly for students whose linguistic and cultural resources have historically been undervalued within dominant academic structures (Nendauni 2025).

Intersectional Dimensions of Decolonial Pedagogy

While I focus on linguistic and knowledge exclusions at the heart of my decolonial approach, I am aware that these rarely happen alone. My understanding of change in academic writing is therefore based on an intersectional view, which considers how language, class, "race", and gender together shape students' experiences. I briefly discuss these below:

Class, "race", and language: Reflecting on the South African context, I cannot ignore how academic writing rules are linked with histories of class and "race". During apartheid, education in English was a sign of privilege and a tool to exclude based on "race". Today, many students from linguistic and educational backgrounds that have been left behind, often from working-class and black communities, are still seen as "lacking" when judged by the usual academic writing standards (Hurst 2010). I see decolonial teaching as a chance to challenge this order by valuing multilingual skills and local knowledge, seeing students' cultural and language backgrounds as strengths rather than weaknesses. This way, we can tackle the ongoing inequalities where "race", class, and language overlap.

Gender and knowledge justice: I also see that academic writing has for a long time favoured a masculine, detached, and supposedly "neutral" voice, often pushing aside collaborative, personal, or storytelling ways of knowing (Vickery 2000). This gendered dimension of epistemic inequality means some ways of expressing ideas are seen as less valid in academia. By welcoming different ways of knowing and working together, my suggested teaching method creates room for more types of expression. It allows students to use their real-life experiences, including those shaped by gender, when doing academic work.

Decolonial practice: I argue that real change through decolonial teaching must be intersectional. It must recognise that problems with academic writing are rarely just about mastering language; they are often clear signs of deeper, linked systems of oppression (Suhr-Sytsma and Brown 2024). By dealing openly with how language, "race", class, and gender overlap, my approach goes beyond just including different students on the surface. It aims for a deep and lasting change. This is how I see creating an academic space that is not only inclusive of language differences but also fair and just for all students.

Synthesis of the Reviewed Literature

Across these bodies of work, there is broad agreement that academic writing is socially situated and shaped by power relations. However, the dominant models have not systematically integrated decolonial and multilingual perspectives into pedagogy, assessment, and institutional policy. This article proposes a conceptual and praxis-oriented framework that positions linguistic inclusivity, epistemic plurality, and collaborative knowledge-making as foundational principles for rethinking academic writing in multilingual universities.

Theoretical Framing

The decolonial approach to academic writing that I propose is anchored in three interrelated principles: linguistic inclusivity, epistemic plurality, and collaborative knowledge-making. These principles synthesise insights from decolonial theory, critical pedagogy, and academic literacies scholarship, while also being informed by my practitioner experience in a multilingual South African university. Rather than treating academic writing as a neutral technical competence, this framework positions it as a historically situated practice shaped by power, colonial legacies, and epistemic hierarchies.

Decolonial theory provides the primary analytical lens through which I interrogate academic writing conventions. Scholars such as Mignolo (2007) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argue that colonialism persists not only through political and economic structures but also through the coloniality of knowledge, whereby Western epistemologies and languages are normalised as universal standards of legitimacy. Within higher education, academic writing operates as a key mechanism through which this coloniality is reproduced, as students are expected to conform to linguistic and rhetorical norms grounded in Eurocentric traditions. Mignolo's notion of "delinking" is therefore central to my argument: A decolonial approach to academic writing requires conscious disengagement from the assumption that monolingual English conventions constitute the sole pathway to academic rigour. Similarly, Zembylas's (2017) concept of the "pluriversal" centres the possibility of multiple co-existing epistemologies, challenging the universalist claims embedded in dominant academic discourse. I thus conceptualise academic writing as a site of epistemic struggle in which alternative ways of knowing

and expressing knowledge can be legitimised rather than assimilated into dominant norms.

Fricker's (2007) theory of epistemic injustice adds an important ethical dimension to this analysis. When students' linguistic repertoires or culturally grounded knowledge practices are devalued within academic contexts, they experience forms of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice that limit their participation in knowledge production. In multilingual universities, monolingual writing norms may therefore function not merely as pedagogical expectations but as mechanisms that constrain epistemic agency. A decolonial pedagogy of academic writing must consequently move beyond access-oriented interventions towards practices that actively redistribute epistemic authority.

Freire's (1970) conception of education as a practice of freedom further strengthens this orientation by centring the dialogic and participatory nature of knowledge construction. Freire's critique of the "banking model" of education resonates strongly with academic writing pedagogy that positions students as passive recipients of disciplinary conventions. In contrast, a decolonial approach views students as co-creators of knowledge who negotiate, reshape, and sometimes resist dominant academic norms. This perspective informs the principle of collaborative knowledge-making, which reconceptualises writing as a dialogic process rather than a unidirectional transmission of rules.

Insights from the academic literacies tradition (Lea and Street 1998; Lillis and Scott 2007) complement these perspectives by emphasising that writing practices are embedded in identity, power, and institutional authority. Academic literacies scholarship has long challenged skills-based approaches to writing; however, integrating it with decolonial theory allows for a more explicit interrogation of coloniality within academic discourse. Together, these theoretical strands converge in the recognition that academic writing is never neutral but socially constructed and politically situated.

The three principles of the proposed framework emerge from this synthesis and operate as follows:

- Linguistic inclusivity challenges the hierarchy that positions English as the sole legitimate academic language. Drawing on translingual and multilingual literacy theories (García and Wei 2015; Michael-Luna and Canagarajah 2015), it conceptualises students' full linguistic repertoires as epistemic resources rather than deviations from normative standards. From a decolonial perspective, legitimising multilingual meaning-making constitutes an act of epistemic disobedience that disrupts linguistic hegemony within the academy.

- Epistemic plurality extends beyond inclusion to affirm the co-equal validity of multiple knowledge systems, including indigenous, local, and community-

based epistemologies. This principle is informed by decolonial calls for cognitive justice (Santos 2016) and the recognition that academic authority has historically privileged Western forms of reasoning and representation. In practice, epistemic plurality may involve integrating culturally grounded rhetorical forms, oral traditions, and situated knowledge into academic work, thereby expanding the boundaries of what counts as legitimate scholarship.

- Collaborative knowledge-making reconfigures the relationships between students, lecturers, and tutors from hierarchical transmission to dialogic co-construction. Informed by Freirean pedagogy and participatory learning theories, this principle positions academic writing as a negotiated practice shaped through interaction rather than imposed through institutional authority. Such collaboration not only supports learning but also redistributes epistemic power by recognising students as legitimate contributors to disciplinary knowledge.

In integrating these principles, the framework advances both the political project of dismantling coloniality in academic writing and the pedagogical aim of fostering more equitable and participatory writing cultures. The theoretical framing presented here directly informs the conceptual model proposed in the next section, where each principle is operationalised through specific pedagogical and institutional strategies, including multilingual assignments, assessment redesign, and the transformation of writing centres. Through this integration of theory and praxis, I seek to contribute to ongoing efforts to reimagine academic writing as a site for epistemic justice and institutional transformation in multilingual universities.

The Proposed Framework for a Decolonial Pedagogy of Academic Writing

Building on the critique of dominant pedagogical models and the theoretical principles outlined above, I propose a conceptual framework that positions multilingualism and epistemic diversity at the centre of academic writing pedagogy. The framework is structured around three interconnected pillars: linguistic inclusivity, epistemic plurality, and collaborative knowledge-making. Rather than functioning as discrete components, these pillars operate relationally and dynamically to challenge the coloniality embedded in academic writing conventions and to foster more equitable forms of participation in knowledge production. Each pillar is translated into practical strategies for curriculum design, assessment reform, and institutional practice.
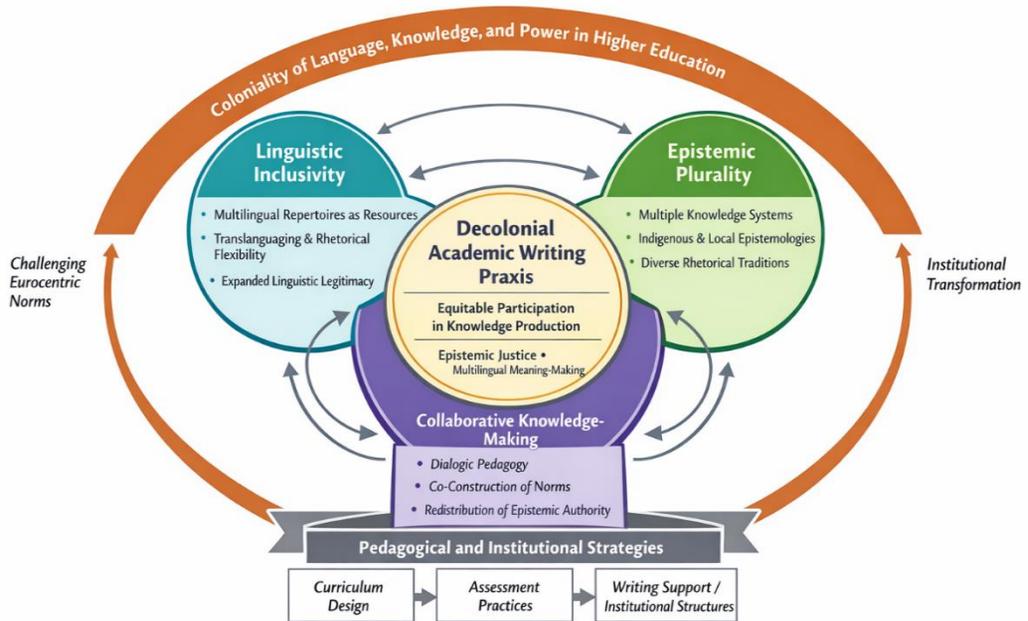
Figure 1: A conceptual framework for a decolonial pedagogy of academic writing

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework for a decolonial pedagogy of academic writing. The three interconnected pillars (linguistic inclusivity, epistemic plurality, and collaborative knowledge-making) operate dynamically to expand linguistic legitimacy, recognise multiple knowledge systems, and redistribute epistemic authority in academic contexts. These pillars inform pedagogical and institutional strategies across curriculum, assessment, and writing support practices, with the aim of advancing epistemic justice and equitable participation in knowledge production. The framework is situated within the broader coloniality of language, knowledge, and power in higher education, highlighting both the structural constraints shaping academic writing and the transformative potential of decolonial pedagogical interventions.

Importantly, the transformative potential of the framework lies in the interaction between these pillars. Linguistic inclusivity without epistemic plurality risks accommodating multiple languages while retaining Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies; epistemic plurality without collaboration may remain theoretically aspirational without altering classroom power relations; and collaboration without linguistic inclusivity may continue to privilege dominant language norms. Their integration therefore creates the conditions for more substantive pedagogical and epistemic transformation.

In combining these dimensions, the framework advances both the political project of dismantling coloniality in academic writing and the pedagogical goal of fostering inclusive and participatory writing cultures. The next sub-section operationalises this framework through concrete strategies for curriculum design, assessment reform, and

institutional practice, demonstrating how theoretical principles can be translated into actionable interventions within multilingual university contexts.

Practical Strategies

The framework can be operationalised through the following interconnected strategies (Table 1). Each strategy explicitly aligns with one or more of the three pillars.

Table 1: Strategies to operationalise a decolonial pedagogy of academic writing

Strategy	Pillars Addressed	Explication
Embedding multilingual writing opportunities	Linguistic inclusivity; epistemic plurality	Assignments allowing bilingual/multilingual submissions, reflective writing in home languages, or collaborative multilingual projects (Makalela 2016; Madiba 2014; Nendauni, 2025).
Redesigning assessment criteria	All three pillars	Assessment rubrics that reward clarity, critical thinking, and evidence across languages, recognising translanguaging as a legitimate rhetorical strategy (Luckett and Hunma 2014).
Developing professional learning programmes	All three pillars	Workshops and training for lecturers and tutors to build capacity in multilingual and decolonial pedagogies (Janks 2010; Mhlongo et al. 2023).
Transforming writing centres	Linguistic inclusivity; collaborative knowledge-making	Reimagining writing centres as multilingual hubs that affirm students' linguistic identities and promote epistemic justice (Clarence 2017; Namakula, Kimani and Kadenge 2025).

Illustrative Case Study

While the proposed conceptual framework is centred on reviewed literature, I am also aware of the importance of providing concrete and workable steps for implementation. I argue that a decolonial pedagogy of academic writing cannot remain purely theoretical; it must be grounded in strategies that can be applied in real classrooms. Therefore, to demonstrate the framework's application, I present a hypothetical example from a second-year sociology course on social justice. The final assignment requires students to analyse a local social issue through a decolonial lens, incorporating at least one academic source from a local or indigenous knowledge system. Students are encouraged to use translanguaging to convey complex ideas. Assessment focuses on the clarity of the argument, depth of analysis, and use of evidence, rather than adherence to monolingual English norms.

A tailored rubric accompanies the assignment (Table 2), signalling to students that their full linguistic and epistemic resources are valued. This transparency helps to normalise multilingual and epistemically plural approaches in academic writing.

Table 2: Multilingual assignment rubric

Criterion	Excellent	Developing	Needs improvement
Argument clarity	The central argument is exceptionally clear, logical, and sustained throughout.	The argument is present but lacks consistent focus or clarity.	The argument is unclear, absent, or illogical.
Epistemic plurality	Indigenous or local knowledge systems are effectively integrated, enriching and challenging dominant theoretical frameworks.	Some attempt to include diverse knowledge systems, but they are not fully integrated.	Relies exclusively on Eurocentric frameworks, ignoring local or indigenous knowledge.
Translanguaging and rhetoric	Multiple languages are used strategically to enhance the argument, demonstrating cultural and rhetorical sophistication.	Translanguaging is used but inconsistently or without strengthening the argument.	Adheres mainly to monolingual English, or multilingual use hinders clarity.
Use of evidence	Draws on a range of credible, relevant sources (academic, indigenous, community-based) to support claims.	Uses some relevant evidence, but engagement is limited or superficial.	Evidence is insufficient or unreliable.

Addressing the Grading Challenge for a Monolingual Lecturer

I am conscious that such assignments might present challenges for lecturers who are not proficient in all the languages students may use. However, I do not see this as insurmountable. In Table 3 below, I provide some strategies that may help monolingual lecturers in grading the multilingual assignment.

Table 3: Strategies for addressing grading challenges for a monolingual lecturer

Strategy	Explication
Focus on core competencies	This includes clarity of argument, critical thinking, and evidence-based reasoning, rather than focusing on linguistic perfection.
Host translanguaging workshops	This will help to model effective strategies and demystify the process for both students and colleagues.
Incorporate collaborative grading and peer review	This will allow students from different linguistic backgrounds to offer feedback to one another.
Leverage writing centres	Writing centres in most universities are multilingual hubs, where trained tutors could assist in interpreting and assessing multilingual elements.
Use technology judiciously	Lecturers can also rely on translation tools for basic comprehension rather than for final assessment decisions.

Most importantly, I would advocate for a shift in mindset. This requires recognising that academic rigour and clarity are not the exclusive domain of monolingual English expression. Below I highlight and address potential institutional resistance.

Addressing Implementation Challenges

I am aware that a decolonial approach to academic writing is not merely a matter of changing pedagogy; it directly challenges entrenched power structures within higher education. Implementing this framework requires anticipating and addressing institutional resistance. For this reason, I anticipate that its implementation would face resistance from multiple quarters, including faculty, administration, and, in some cases, students themselves. In this section, I discuss the challenges and implementation aspects of my decolonial approach to academic writing, focusing especially on the pushback from faculty and the imperative for systemic curricular redesign.

When informally sharing my ideas with colleagues, I have encountered resistance from some faculty members who are concerned that embracing linguistic inclusivity and epistemic plurality might undermine academic standards or rigour. This pushback often stems from entrenched beliefs in monolingual English proficiency as the hallmark of academic excellence (Graham 1987; Jang and Brutt-Griffler 2019) as well as anxieties about how to assess multilingual students fairly (Thompson and Lee 2013). Addressing these concerns requires deliberate institutional change management strategies that emphasise dialogue, professional development, and shared learning. Engaging faculty through workshops and collaborative forums can open spaces to critically reflect on their own assumptions about language and knowledge, while showcasing successful examples of multilingual writing that maintain rigour and analytical depth.

Padayachee, Matimolane, and Ganas (2018) advise that systemic curricular redesign is essential to embed the decolonial framework sustainably within academic programmes.

This entails revisiting learning outcomes, syllabi, and assessment criteria to align them with principles of linguistic inclusivity and epistemic justice. Institutional leaders and policy advocates play a critical role here by championing inclusive language policies, providing resources and support for faculty development, and incentivising pedagogical innovation. Collaborative governance structures involving faculty, students, and administration can build consensus and shared accountability for these reforms (Amsler and Boruvka 2019).

I recognise potential critiques and limitations of my approach. For instance, questions often arise about maintaining academic rigour in multilingual writing practices (Michael-Luna and Canagarajah 2015). I argue that rigour should be reframed not as conformity to monolingual English norms but as the clarity, coherence, and critical engagement within diverse linguistic frameworks. Moreover, practical constraints such as limited institutional resources, faculty workload, and the scale of linguistic diversity in some universities pose challenges to implementation. These require phased, context-sensitive strategies and ongoing evaluation to ensure feasibility and impact.

Ultimately, this approach demands a shift in mindset at multiple levels of the institution, from individual faculty to policy-makers, and a commitment to sustained dialogue, capacity-building, and structural change. While the path is complex, the potential for more just, inclusive, and vibrant academic writing cultures justifies these efforts. I remain committed to collaborating with colleagues and institutions to navigate these challenges and advance this transformative agenda.

Situating the Proposed Framework within the Global Context

While grounded in the specific historical and linguistic realities of South African higher education, the decolonial framework proposed here has applicability in multilingual academic contexts across the globe. The dominance of monolingual, English-centric writing conventions is not unique to South Africa; it is a persistent feature of many postcolonial and multilingual higher education systems, where it continues to marginalise non-dominant linguistic repertoires and the epistemologies they carry.

In Latin America, for example, universities in Bolivia and Ecuador have sought to integrate indigenous languages such as Quechua and Aymara into higher education curricula, aligning with plurinational policy commitments (Samaniego-Santillán, Maldonado-Garcés, and Delgado-Quilismal 2024). These efforts often involve bilingual or multilingual academic writing initiatives, yet they face similar tensions between validating indigenous rhetorical traditions and meeting international publication norms (Mignolo and Walsh 2018).

In Asia, initiatives in Hong Kong and Singapore to incorporate translanguaging into academic literacy programmes have demonstrated its potential to deepen students' conceptual engagement while maintaining academic rigour (Huang 2024). However, these interventions have also encountered institutional resistance rooted in the prestige

of English as the language of global scholarship, mirroring the challenges faced in South Africa.

In Europe, where multilingualism is often framed through European Union (EU) policy imperatives, universities in countries such as Finland and Luxembourg have experimented with dual-medium teaching and assessment (Busch 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas 2004). While these contexts differ from postcolonial ones, they reveal parallel tensions between promoting linguistic diversity and adhering to the demands of English-dominated academic publishing (Aalto and Mustonen 2022).

These examples illustrate that dismantling linguistic hegemony in academic writing is both a local and global challenge. The principles underpinning my framework (linguistic inclusivity, epistemic plurality, and collaborative knowledge-making) offer a flexible structure adaptable to diverse contexts. In each setting, successful application requires sensitivity to the local linguistic ecology, institutional histories, and power dynamics, alongside a willingness to redefine academic rigour in ways that value multiple languages and epistemologies.

In positioning multilingualism not as an impediment but as a catalyst for scholarly creativity, this framework contributes to a growing global movement for epistemic justice in higher education. In doing so, it invites dialogue across multilingual academic contexts, fostering shared strategies for resisting monolingual norms and building more equitable academic cultures.

Implications for Transformation in Higher Education

I see the adoption of a decolonial pedagogy of academic writing as having far-reaching implications for the broader transformation agenda in South African higher education. The challenge is not only to widen access to universities but also to ensure equitable participation and success for students who draw on diverse linguistic and educational repertoires (Woldegiorgis and Chiramba 2025). Since academic writing functions as a powerful gatekeeping mechanism, it is a crucial site where either inequality is reproduced, or transformation is advanced.

In recognising multilingualism and epistemic plurality as legitimate academic resources, I believe we can begin to dismantle the colonial legacies that have long excluded diverse voices from the academy (Heugh 2015; Moore 2025; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). This commitment aligns with the constitutional mandate to promote equality, as well as with the Language Policy for Higher Education, which positions multilingualism as a pathway to equity and social cohesion (Moloi 2007).

To this end, embracing a decolonial approach also fosters epistemic justice in the sense articulated by Fricker (2007). It enables students to contribute to knowledge from within their own linguistic and cultural frameworks, which challenges entrenched hierarchies of knowledge production and opens space for a more inclusive and democratic

intellectual culture. I have found that such inclusivity not only strengthens student engagement and confidence but also has the potential to reduce the high attrition rates among disadvantaged student groups (Madiba 2014).

I see writing centres, academic development units, and lecturers as pivotal actors in this transformation. Writing centres, in particular, can be reimagined from remedial spaces into hubs for multilingual and decolonial literacy practices (Clarence 2017). Achieving this, however, requires institutional commitment to staff training, resource allocation, and policy development that actively supports linguistic diversity in teaching, learning, and assessment.

Ultimately, my vision aligns with critical pedagogy's aspiration for education as a practice of freedom and social justice (Freire 1970). I believe that universities must interrogate their own epistemological assumptions and power relations if they are to create genuinely inclusive and transformative academic environments. This is the kind of higher education landscape I am working towards, one in which academic writing becomes a vehicle for empowerment rather than exclusion.

Conclusion

This article has argued that academic writing in South African higher education remains deeply shaped by Eurocentric and monolingual English norms that perpetuate epistemic exclusion, particularly for students who draw on diverse linguistic repertoires. While dominant pedagogical models, the study skills, academic socialisation, and academic literacies approaches, have advanced writing support, they have seldom confronted the coloniality embedded in academic norms.

In response, I have proposed a conceptual and praxis-oriented decolonial framework built on three interrelated principles: linguistic inclusivity, epistemic plurality, and collaborative knowledge-making. Grounded in decolonial theory, critical pedagogy, and academic literacies scholarship, and informed by sustained practitioner experience, the framework reconceptualises academic writing as a socially and politically situated practice capable of advancing epistemic justice and institutional transformation.

Practical strategies for curriculum design, assessment reform, and writing centre practice have been outlined to operationalise these principles. While developed in the South African context, the framework speaks to shared global challenges in multilingual universities, from Latin American efforts to integrate indigenous languages into academic writing, to translanguaging initiatives in Asian higher education, and multilingual assessment reforms in parts of Europe. These cases demonstrate both the universality of the tensions between linguistic diversity and monolingual academic norms, and the adaptability of the proposed approach across diverse linguistic ecologies.

The article's distinctive contribution lies in bridging theory and praxis: advancing a decolonial critique of academic writing while offering workable strategies that lecturers,

writing centre practitioners, and institutions can adapt to their own contexts. The challenge is not only to widen access to higher education, but also to transform the epistemic and linguistic structures that shape participation and success. Addressing this requires a shift in how academic rigour is defined, from adherence to monolingual norms to the clarity, coherence, and critical engagement achievable through diverse languages and epistemologies.

In reimagining academic writing as a site for dismantling epistemic hierarchies and fostering collaborative, multilingual knowledge-making, this framework aligns with broader global movements for epistemic justice in higher education. It invites scholars, educators, and policy-makers to move beyond incremental adjustments and to commit to systemic change that affirms the multiplicity of voices, languages, and knowledge systems that constitute the academy.

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