

The Nature and Direction of Curriculum Transformation: The Case of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study examined the nature and direction of curricular reforms in Zimbabwean higher education, focusing on the opportunities and challenges in decolonising the curriculum. Using a critical paradigm, the research analysed educators' difficulties in integrating diverse Indigenous perspectives into existing courses. A literature review methodology was employed to understand the decolonisation process and the efforts to address community needs. The study also investigated how institutional policies influence the inclusion of various languages in the curriculum. It highlights the importance of teacher training, community engagement, and collaborative curriculum development with Indigenous communities to create a more inclusive and decolonised educational framework in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. The study found that integrating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum is crucial for decolonisation. However, educators face significant challenges in this process, including a lack of resources and institutional support. The study draws on best practices from existing literature.

Keywords: curriculum; transformation; decolonise; Indigenous knowledge systems; Zimbabwean curriculum



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Introduction

This study examined Zimbabwe's curriculum reform, exploring the reasons behind the change and its impact on education. It explores the history of Zimbabwe's educational system, focusing on key issues and pivotal moments that have influenced the current curriculum. Additionally, it analyses the recent reforms by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, outlining the reasons for the adjustments, the ambitious goals they aim to achieve, and their potential societal, educational, and student-related impacts. The study employs strong theoretical frameworks and empirical data investigations to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with curricular change in Zimbabwe. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute significantly to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of curriculum change in Zimbabwe by thoroughly examining the current state of curriculum transition.

The rich historical background of Zimbabwe's educational system extends back to the colonial era. Initially, only a tiny portion of the populace, usually the colonial elite, had access to the restricted educational options. After the Native Education Ordinance of 1907 was passed in the twentieth century, the colonial education philosophy, content, organisation, and administration for Africans persisted until Zimbabwe gained its independence in 1980 (Fatar 2018). Some African pupils were enrolled in mission schools that received grants-in-aid from the government via the Education Ordinance of 1899. Nonetheless, the educational system was split between European and African institutions, with Europeans having disproportionately greater access to high-quality education and finance. After independence, the new administration established plans to increase access and raise the standard of education nationwide, after realising the vital role that education plays in both economic growth and nation-building (Mbembe 2016). The government guaranteed free and mandatory basic and secondary education for all students, and the Education Act of 1979 restricted access to each type of school through a zoning system based on domicile. As a result, enrolment in elementary and secondary schools significantly increased. The attempts to overcome the prejudices and injustices left over from the colonial educational system illustrate that curriculum transformation in the post-colonial age is important.

According to the green paper *Creating Innovative Doctorates: Mapping Institutional Frameworks and Processes for Doctoral Training in Zimbabwe* (Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education [ZIMCHE] 2021), Africa contributed only 2% of the world's knowledge production. The colonial past had forgotten Africa as a potential partner in research and education, and only saw it as a source of labour and resources. The new awakening required clear direction to spearhead the decolonisation of education so that Africa could develop innovators who could contribute to knowledge generation to lead sustainable development. It is evident that Southern Africa, a region known for its cultural diversity and rich Indigenous knowledge systems, has been grappling with the legacy of colonial education structures that often marginalise and undermine local knowledge. The decolonisation of the curriculum in Southern Africa is crucial for

recognising and preserving Indigenous perspectives, languages, and traditions within the educational system. This process is essential for promoting cultural identity, fostering inclusivity, and addressing historical injustices in education.

Educators in Southern Africa encounter various obstacles when incorporating Indigenous knowledge perspectives into the curriculum. These challenges may include cultural biases, lack of adequate resources, resistance to change, and the need for effective training and support in integrating diverse knowledge systems. Institutional policies play a significant role in shaping the utilisation of diverse languages within the curriculum. These policies can either support or hinder the inclusion of Indigenous languages, thereby influencing the representation and recognition of different knowledge systems. Understanding how institutional frameworks impact language diversity is crucial for promoting linguistic inclusivity and cultural preservation.

Statement of the Problem

According to Chinangure and Chindanya (2019) and Munyoro, Makota, and Tanhara (2016), the curriculum inherited from colonial times was purely academic and did not equip students with life skills to survive outside formal employment. In the Zimbabwean context, a 1999 research study by the Nziramasanga Commission established a largely academic curriculum that needed to be decolonised to pave the way for black emancipation.

Main Research Question

How can the decolonisation of the curriculum in Zimbabwe be effectively achieved to redress injustices in education?

Research Questions:

- What challenges do higher education institutions face in integrating Indigenous knowledge perspectives into the curriculum?
- What impact do institutional policies have on the decolonisation of the curriculum?
- What best practices can be employed to decolonise the curriculum?

Literature Review

When most African countries attained independence, they envisaged a democratic and free society where all citizens would have equal opportunities and resources (Sampson 2012). In South Africa, Nelson Mandela believed that education was the most potent weapon that could be used to change the world (Mandela 2008). The understanding was that education could eliminate poverty, reduce diseases, eradicate inequality, and promote sustainable utilisation of resources and peace. However, a few years after

independence, 59.7% of the young adults in South Africa were not employed. The context spells out that very little was done to decolonise education when the country became free from colonisation. The same challenges were experienced and continued to define the direction of education. As a result, most families that were formerly marginalised remained the same or worse.

Munyoro, Makota, and Tanhara (2016) also point out that the Zimbabwe government inherited an education system that was biased against the black majority. However, Mugabe improved the literacy rate to 98% and ensured every Zimbabwean had access to education. Education did not only become a right of every Zimbabwean—it was made compulsory. In addition, basic education was, as a matter of policy, free for all. Zimbabwe became a source of manpower and produced professionals for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region and overseas. The current unemployment statistics by researchers show that 98% of the youth in Zimbabwe are unemployed (Langa 2016).

According to Chinangure and Chindanya (2019), and Munyoro, Makota, and Tanhara (2016), the curriculum inherited from colonial times was purely academic and did not equip students with life skills to survive outside formal employment. In the Zimbabwean context, a research study by the Nziramasanga Commission in 1999 established a largely academic curriculum that needed to be revamped. Areas that needed attention, among others, included the development of Indigenous languages, the development of information and communication technology (ICT) skills, the promotion of practical skills in primary schools, followed by the introduction of vocational and training education in secondary schools, and, most importantly, giving attention to the girl child (Nziramasanga 1999).

Unfortunately, the curriculum that remained largely traditional was to respond to technological advancement (Kurasha and Chabaya 2013). Chinangure and Mapaire (2017) point out that in today's techno-savvy society and the global business landscape, 93% of the world uses technology. The education system did not swiftly integrate ICT into the system to match current trends as the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommended. The new dispensations lacked resources and proper training of personnel (Chinangure and Mapaire 2017).

Methodology

The study utilises the literature review approach. Data was gathered from secondary sources and analysed to lay a foundation for the decolonisation of the curriculum. Integrating diverse empirical findings and viewpoints was pivotal in addressing the research questions.

Discussion of Findings

Decolonising the curriculum requires the implementation of best practices that prioritise inclusivity, cultural relevance, and community engagement. Strategies such as involving local communities in curriculum development, providing professional development for educators on Indigenous knowledge systems, promoting multilingual education, and fostering partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities are essential for achieving a more decolonised and inclusive educational system in Southern Africa.

Previous studies show that young people were passionate about curriculum change as a means of empowerment because the country could not offer them decent employment after university education. A decolonised curriculum would address their needs. However, planning the new curriculum was rushed, leaving out the concerns of academics, parents, and other important stakeholders.

Regarding the impact institutional policies had on the decolonisation of curriculum, Zimbabwe, like any other country in Sub-Saharan Africa, had to take new steps to promote innovation and development through the 5.0 curriculum. This curriculum brought new thinking based on teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation. This was a shift from the 3.0 teaching, research, and community service curriculum that produced graduates who were merely jobseekers. The new direction defined by the new policy has faced challenges related to training, stakeholder involvement, resources, and funding.

The need for curriculum transformation was more apparent when one looked at how university graduates from educational institutions failed to take an active role in the economy. The paper qualifications and traditional academic education did not give graduates the practical skills needed to create jobs. This lack of practical skills forced many graduates to seek work in other countries under difficult circumstances. People hoped the education system would empower young people to be self-sufficient and successful entrepreneurs. The communities these unemployed graduates came from faced severe challenges such as poor roads, diseases, a lack of adequate housing, and climate change-related problems. Yet, these graduates with high university qualifications could not apply their knowledge innovatively to solve their problems. The advent of technology made curriculum change and innovation a necessity (Dokora 2016). The aim was to educate students to create jobs rather than prepare them for existing roles. Dokora (2016) further argues that curriculum decolonisation was needed to enable students to fit into the economic system, which required graduates to seek jobs and start businesses using the country's resources.

Curriculum decolonisation cannot succeed if it happens in isolation. The students produced by educational institutions are no longer local but global citizens due to globalisation and social change. The need for diversity and social cohesion are critical factors for coexistence in the global community. For Africans, the concept of Ubuntu

and self-identity had to be promoted through a change in the curriculum (Dokora 2016). No curriculum transformation could occur without considering the role of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Dokora 2016). The introduction of curriculum 5.0 was a response to this call.

The prevailing academic curriculum, as highlighted by Wilson (2005), primarily directed students towards pursuing wage-based employment. Consequently, higher education institutions were established to uphold white supremacy. English was the language of instruction to perpetuate this dominance, indicating that universities were instruments for perpetuating colonial ideologies (Zezeza 2009). The education provided by these institutions had stagnated, serving as a labour force for the colonial economic system. Formal job opportunities became scarce as the white population abandoned industries and commercial farms in Zimbabwe. Despite initial opposition, recognising the importance of sustainable skills was considered crucial for Zimbabwe's progress as a nation, achievable through decolonising the curriculum.

The curriculum content in Zimbabwe, like in the Republic of South Africa, lacked contextualisation for the Indigenous settings and people. Policy briefs were crafted by individuals aiming to further their political agendas. Furthermore, the knowledge framework was centred around Western civilisation and Eurocentric theories, prioritising them as the foundation of knowledge over Indigenous knowledge systems (Zezeza 2009).

Decolonising the curriculum may require African universities to place Indigenous content knowledge at the core of knowledge within African universities (Mbembe 2018). This viewpoint emphasises the necessity to provide avenues for African content and knowledge, which have often been marginalised (Ruddock 2018). This implies using African perspectives in African higher education institutions in a manner that amplifies the diverse life worlds of Africans. What is lacking in the Zimbabwean context is goodwill in opening space for the participation of all stakeholders. There are no provisions for specific examples, guidelines, frameworks, and rules for schools to follow. The emphasis was on innovation, which is supported by the building of innovation hubs. Yet the content of the university curriculum remains largely the same, especially in assessment and teaching methodology.

Previously, the norm for institutions of higher learning was to connect learning with the job market (Lester and Costley 2010) and meet the skills base requirements of employers. Unfortunately, planning for employment within the higher education curriculum produced graduates with qualifications that were not relevant to the employment being offered at the time because of social and technological changes. The decolonisation of the curriculum could not succeed without considering local and international needs and demands of a volatile environment. Thus, the changes were to consider the interdisciplinary nature of challenges so that graduates from any institution could collaborate with other professionals to solve any arising problems. The

institutions are challenged to develop interdisciplinary curricula and joint degrees. This collaboration can occur internationally and nationally among universities in Zimbabwe and across various fields of study. In addition, the graduates were encouraged to be lifelong learners with the zeal to adapt to new challenges and developments. Such efforts would enhance graduate employability and address the influence of national and global economic conditions on the higher education curriculum (Bechuke and Emekako 2022). Numerous studies have revealed a significant decline in academic performance where imposed languages are used compared to where Indigenous languages are utilised as the medium of instruction (Naidoo 2012). Decolonisation may mean developing educational materials and textbooks in local languages. However, this has not been done and will remain mere talk if the necessary changes are not made.

Recommendations

When decolonising or transforming the curriculum in higher education, key resources such as land and minerals must be considered. A resource-oriented curriculum is more sustainable and better aligned with the well-being of the population it serves. Before implementing significant changes, careful consideration should be given to funding curriculum initiatives. Ideally, any modifications to the existing curriculum should be preceded by thorough training of those responsible for implementation. This approach ensures that the quality of education remains uncompromised throughout the process. Human capital, social, political, economic, and technical changes in Zimbabwe and throughout the world should all be reflected in the curricular framework.

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