



CHAPTER 5:

Responding to the call for transformation in higher education in South Africa: Beyond "decolonisation" to contextualisation of the curriculum

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Abstract

South African higher education has undergone numerous social, political and cultural changes in response to the call for transformation in the sector. The attention-grabbing student protests – popularly referred to as the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall campaigns – set a new tone and platform for reflection by leaders in the education sector, inclusive of higher- and basic education in South Africa. These have steered many conferences, seminars and research on “decolonisation” by national education departments, universities, colleges and organisations such as Universities South Africa (USAf). Some of these activities have ushered a shift in the understanding and use of the concept ‘transformation’ to mean ‘decolonisation’ of the curriculum. Giving this shift, we collected data using a systematic literature review to answer the following question: How can we respond to the call for transformation in HE beyond decolonisation of the curriculum in order to achieve fitness for and of the purpose of HE in South Africa? From the data collected, we argue that the approach of perceiving

decolonisation as synonymous to transformation is limiting in focus and scope and impacts less on transformational challenges in higher education. We argue that transformation in higher education should be considered in terms of the four main patterns determined by Du Preez, Simmonds and Verhoef (2016): transformation through curriculum, transformation through structures, transformation through redressing equity and transformation through access. In terms of the dimension of transformation through curriculum, it is suggested that an all-inclusive curriculum suited for globalisation should be considered. Such a curricular in HE is contextualised and would not only address the need to decolonise the higher education curriculum and provide cognitive justice to the previously disadvantaged, but will also address other higher education challenges such as graduate dropout and throughput, graduate employment and curriculum relevance to national and international economic growth which is standing on our way from achieving the purpose of and for Higher Education.

Keywords: transformation, decolonisation, contextualisation, inclusivity of the curriculum, higher education in South Africa

Introduction

The current pressure and centrality of HE transformation in South Africa on decolonisation of the curriculum arguably suggest that it is the solution to all HE dilemmas and our path to fitness of and for purpose in HE. The outcomes from a series of debates on the subject have birthed different approaches to decolonising the curriculum. Suggested approaches vary from changing the content to a complete deconstruction and reconstruction of the curriculum so as to change the purpose of the curriculum, change the notions of assessment, change the ways in which learning is weighted and measured etc. The advocating by students and activists almost portrays that, once the curriculum is decolonised, depending on what it means, all other curriculum-related challenges associated with design, development, implementation and management – such as technology integration, low throughput, access, cognitive justice, student performance, student retention and employable

graduates, etc – would disappear. We argue that the need to address these other curriculum related challenges are central to our achievement of fitness for and of purpose in HE and should be fundamental in our drive for HE transformation. We argue further that the complexities in the understanding of the word transformation or curriculum transformation and the prominence in the equation of the word to decolonisation of the curriculum despite the limitations in the meaning of decolonisation when compared to transformation is a concern.

The HE transformation agenda, just like the HE curriculum, is broad with diverse imperatives. The route via the current agenda of decolonisation of the curriculum to achieve HE transformation is one approach – a small piece of the pie with necessary impact to the bigger picture. However, it is necessary to consider that the curriculum in HE, just like in any other level of education, is highly influenced by the social, physical, economic and cultural environment, both nationally and internationally. This implies that the context of these influencers affects what is incorporated in the curriculum design and development and subsequently determines how the curriculum should be implemented for it to be relevant. This suggests the need for curriculum contextualisation – a concept beyond curriculum content for those who own it. Therefore, a rethink on content verification and pedagogic methodologies as some scholars see decolonisation of the curriculum to mean is simply not enough for HE transformation. We explore what the concept of curriculum contextualisation means for the creators and consumers of the HE curriculum in a later section.

Background of the chapter

Globally, there are growing concerns over transformation in higher education (HE) (Higher Education) (Mok, 2015), with different geographical areas being

influenced by different kinds of political, social and cultural forces. These concerns are evident in scholarly research and in the popular media about the “crisis in higher education” both locally and internationally. For example, Bagarukayo & Kalema (2015) say that HE is standing on a cliff, either waiting to disappear into the chasm of insignificance or needing to take off soaring to new heights in an ICT revolution, popularly referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). In the African context, Ngubane & Makua (2021) believes there is limited appreciation and respect for ‘Africanness’ in the curricular of higher education in Africa. Blignaut and Koopman (2020) say the pedagogies in higher education are not culturally responsive and cognizant of social justice issues. Of greater concern, especially in South Africa, are the difficulties universities face to adapt their structures and functions and change their culture to reflect the changing realities and forces of society (Bagarukayo & Kalema, 2015).

Generally, it is a difficult task for all stakeholders in HE nationally and internationally to adapt their structures and change their culture as part of transformation. This is because some structures take long to change and some institutional cultures are shaped by many years of operation within certain structures. Moreover, bearing in mind the complexity of the social forces behind the call for HE transformation in South Africa, and particularly the decolonisation of the curriculum of universities, the call for HE transformation only gets more complex in South Africa. Considering that the “what” (what is to be included in the curriculum), “how” (how is it to be taught) and “who” (who is supposed to teach it and who is being taught) of the curriculum of universities are still a space of contention with strong influence from government, industry, organizations, the university community and society in general, it becomes challenging to direct and manage change irrespective of such pressures.

Given the situation, it is tempting for institutions to make decisions on the approach(es) to follow to transform South African HE based on the influence from a social group with more pressure. This seem to be the growing trend across HE institutions. However, it is important to consider the interests of all role players from different disciplinary, departmental, institutional, national and international contexts with strong influence in the HE curriculum. The approach of considering the interest of all stakeholders is contextual and aligns with Fourie (1999) view of transformation in HE. Fourie (1999) claim that transformation of higher education institutions does not only involve changes in the composition of staff and students, or changes in governance structures or course content. In essence, it is about the transformation of the organisational culture and the development and acceptance of new, shared values which can be achieved through the involvement of all stakeholders and role-players, of which academic staff requires particular attention (Fourie, 1999). As such, transformation of HE curriculum should be understood as a social practice which is concerned with the cultural and social conditions that underpin the construction of curriculum knowledge (Luckett 2010).

Problem statement

There are a lot of struggles that have influenced and are still influencing transformation in HE but are not new. The pressure to transform HE has, however, recently received heated attention through the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall campaigns in South Africa. Together, these struggles have warranted inquiries into transformational plans in the country by government departments and higher education institutions (HEIs).

In 1994, the then new South African democratic government committed itself to transform HE, addressing the inherited apartheid social and

economic structures that favoured a distinct group in the country. Therefore, post-apartheid South Africa has witnessed an array of transformation-oriented initiatives, all addressing what different role-players think South African HE should look like (Badat, 2010, Mamdani, 2011) after redress in political, sociological and educational spaces in the country (Soudien, 2015).

However, given its history, the process in South Africa has differed from the complexities and demands for transformation experienced in other countries. The South African government of 1994 inherited a fragmented and uncoordinated higher education system and equity, social justice and inclusivity became important reference points in the fight for a transformed education system (Badat, 2010). However, curriculum transformation is often loosely defined and that sometimes derail the HE transformation project. Different scholars offer varied viewpoints on what they understand curriculum transformation to mean or entail. Given the level of pressure from some stakeholders' groups, the conception that equate decoloniality to transformation is gradually gaining prominence. The HESA feels that this one-dimensional or narrow conceptions of the remit and nature of HE transformation can no longer be predominant in the South African context (HESA, 2015). As such, there is need to reconsider the understanding of HE transformation and the transformation of the curriculum in South Africa in order to refocus the HE transformation project. For this reason, the DHET directs the South African debate on HE transformation by considering "transformation" to refer to a comprehensive, deep-rooted and ongoing social process seeking to achieve a fundamental reconstitution and development of its universities and other HEIs to reflect and promote the vision of a democratic society through its curriculum project (DHET, 2013). In more specific settings of teaching and learning in HE, this vision is fused with transformational goals in the post-apartheid era to realise a more representative demographic profile of South African campuses with the

assumption that better democracy and relevance of all citizens are achieved (Lockett, 2010).

Even though the DHET curriculum project to ensure HE transformation has started with some notable achievements through funding and policies (Ebewo and Sirayi, 2018), so much must still be done in terms of the curriculum, access and cognitive justice so as to reach the democratic and human participation that is needed. This entails a simultaneous process of eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and creating a HE Sector that gives full expression to the talents, values and traditions of all South Africans, particularly the marginalised and poor (HESA, 2015). One would expect that such needed transformation (as defined by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2013) would have been realised by now, 26 years after the ending of apartheid rule and the establishment of a democratic South Africa. Unfortunately, this is not the case; not to say nothing has been done to dismantle the HE epistemologies of the apartheid era, nor do we disqualify the attempts made by institutions and curriculum mediators to decolonise the curriculum. We only argue that there is more to curriculum transformation that have been unconsciously overlooked.

We present some efforts by some of South Africa's top-rated universities – Stellenbosch University (SU), Rhodes University (RU), and the North-West University (NWU) – to show how they have attempted to respond to protesters' demands at an institutional level coupled with initiatives by other stakeholders (government departments). These protests were initiated mainly by black students; however, other races and even a few academics later joined the campaigns – from the streets of South Africa to seminars and conferences rooms. There has been a commendable effort by university management immediately after the heated student protests emerged.

Even though there are some indicators that transformation has been achieved – like having more black students – student access, dropout- and failure rates are still high and are still differentiated along lines of race among both undergraduate and postgraduate students (DHET, 2020) not to speak of the dominant demographic of senior academic staff being white (Vorster, 2016).

Another key issue raised by the student protests was black students questioning their alienation by institutional culture – making the university culture warmer and friendly to black students by respecting their historical struggles, values and cultures. They also quest for epistemological access. Moreover, in the teaching and learning space, the need was highlighted to start paying attention to and allowing for an inclusive choice pertaining to curriculum content and pedagogy. These protests were intended to remind the universities of these failures. Protesters believed that the curriculum they learnt and the methods that were forced upon them were not necessarily good for the black child to function appropriately in his or her immediate society and to participate in the global world.

As noted earlier, reacting to these protests in an attempt to address the concerns raised regarding the HE curriculum, most universities are currently undertaking steps to transform, bringing to light a HE curriculum that serves the interests of all South Africans. However, the influential groups dictating the approach so far have been stakeholders and interest groups with the thinking that the only way to transform the HE curriculum is to decolonise the curriculum. This is not surprising because of historical facets. Probably since the curriculum was used as a tool of exclusion during colonization, then the only way to right the wrong is to decolonise the curriculum. This creates the impression that decoloniality of the curriculum is the only transformative agenda relevant to the South African context. This is part of the national

context that institutional- and program or discipline contexts should respond to.

Oftentimes, the terms transformation and decolonisation are mistaken as meaning the same thing. This misconception consequently communicates an ideology that is becoming more popular – that curriculum transformation means decolonisation of the curriculum. Hence, the understanding of decolonizing the curriculum to mean replacing texts by white and European scholars with work by those who are neither (Mgqwashu, 2018) is curriculum transformation. This thinking is evoking strong emotions and responses that are affecting the general process of transformation in HE and the decolonisation of the curriculum. In Naledi Pandor's doctoral research on "contested meanings of transformation in HE South Africa," her findings revealed that researchers and policymakers hold multiple views due to contradicting goals of transformation in equity, development and globalization (Naledi, 2018). According to Soudien (2015:4), "Manuel Castells says of us, we South African, that when we mention the word transformation we stop thinking." We are not clear on the best way to follow and often we condemn ourselves to socio-cultural theories on knowledge struggles and curricular options (Soudien, 2015). This only confirms how complex and complicated the understanding of the word has become to South Africans. This level of uncertainty usually promotes an avenue for stakeholders to easily align with a popular ideology which at this time is the equation of the word to decolonisation of the curriculum.

We argue that the complexities in the understanding of the word transformation or curriculum transformation and the prominence in the equation of the word to decolonisation of the curriculum despite the limitations in the meaning of decolonisation when compared to transformation is a concern. As such, we suggest the need to rather consider

the contextualisation of the curriculum as a better approach to achieving the curriculum transformation domain of HE transformation. We must state clearly that we do not proffer a framework that can be used for the decolonisation agenda or transformation in HE. We are interested in shifting the minds of scholars, curriculum specialists and senior managers in South African universities to consider approaches to curriculum contextualisation in the drive for curriculum transformation as one of the four pillars of HE transformation of which the decolonial agenda is part. To achieve this, we first present a review of literature that confirms the position that most stakeholders consider HE curriculum transformation synonymous decolonisation of the curriculum and how we got to see that we need to contextualise the curriculum if we are to transform the HE Sector.

Aim of the chapter

The main aim of this chapter was to present alternative approach to responding to the call for transformation in HE in South Africa beyond the decolonisation of the curriculum.

In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives were achieved:

- Explain the concept transformation in HE and decolonisation of the curriculum and highlight the difference
- Explore the understanding and use of the concept curriculum contextualisation in higher education for the creators and consumers of the HE curriculum.
- Explore the consideration of the contextualisation of the curriculum as a better approach to achieving the curriculum transformation domain of HE transformation.

Research design and methodology

This chapter made use of literature review as a research method. This was used in this chapter as a systematic way of collecting and synthesising previous research (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003) in order to create a firm foundation for advancing knowledge on the use of curriculum contextualisation to achieve transformation in HE in South Africa. We integrated findings and perspectives from many empirical findings to answer the research question and achieve the aim and objectives of the chapter. In this research, we collected data using a systematic literature review to answer the following question:

How can we respond to the call for transformation HE in South Africa beyond the decolonisation of the curriculum in order to achieve fitness for and of purpose in HE?

All evidence that answers the research question were included. We reviewed peer-reviewed journal articles and other secondary data obtained from published annual reports from higher learning institutions and policy documents. A literature search was conducted to create a database of articles that focused on Transformation in Higher Education in South Africa and the debates on decolonisation and contextualisation. The following keywords/key concepts were used during the literature search: Higher Education transformation, decolonisation of the Higher Education curricular, contextualisation of higher education curricular

Conceptual framework

The dominance of Eurocentric worldviews and the post-apartheid curriculum in South Africa

We pose the following question: Was South African higher education colonised?

There are different ways to answer this question, even though the obvious answer is yes. This question could be answered through conceptual approaches and languages of description that support the decolonisation debate. However, as Fataar (2018) explains, the answer perhaps warrants a deeper reflection on the terms on which knowledge is selected, how it is taught and the basis on which the curricular at universities are constituted. In other words, decolonisation should be viewed from multiple viewpoints using a deep approach to this phenomenon. From this standpoint, and logically in terms of the need for cognitive justice, we are convinced that HE knowledge was not contextualised for the indigenous settings and people of South Africa. Moreover, if one considers the colonial mentality instigated through the curriculum of HE – i.e. that civilization is measured by European terms – then this goes beyond just curriculum decontextualisation and also includes political control and dominance and epistemic violence.

Since there are schools and universities accused (particularly during the student protests in 2015) of presenting content that pays little or no attention to the inclusion of indigenous knowledge as part of the contextualised package, is it socially just and academically correct to say South Africa HE was and is still colonised? This greatly depends on one's perspective of or approach to decolonisation. Considering that the knowledge in South African universities favours the Western canon founded on a separation of Western knowledge from non-Western knowers suggests

that modern knowledge would help instantiate foreign subjects. This is not surprising when one considers that the original idea of the colonist elites was to establish European civilization in the colonies when they set up universities (Pietsch, 2013).

Furthermore, we refer to the work of Soudien (2015) titled “Of false-starts, blind spots, cul-de-sacs and legitimacy struggles: the curriculum debate in South African higher education.” He writes, “if it is priority of the university to open access to previously excluded groups what does this way of thinking say about the knowledges of the excluded?” (p. 8). Clearly, no consideration was given to their histories, worldviews, not to speak of ontological and epistemological affordances. How do we start to deal with the freedom of our knowledge to become assimilated into the paths of transformation? The answers to these questions are blurry and would require an embraced approach towards a solution.

It becomes quite obvious that the whole idea of setting up universities in South Africa was a colonial project to promote white supremacy. To ensure that the supremacy remains rooted, universities were intended to train white youths to further expand their colonial society (Zeleta, 2009) and in the case of HBU’s, to provide bureaucratic labour for the apartheid state. Current challenges plaguing South African society today, such as racism, segregation and epistemic violence, can all be traced back to the establishment of colonial universities in South Africa. Just like colonial rule included political control and dominance, colonial universities were no different. Universities were used to continue the colonial dominance by enforcing the idea and thinking that civilization is Western. Eurocentric worldviews were at the center of African universities, relegating African and other worldviews. This is evident in the curriculum of universities, which are unapologetically Eurocentric

(Zeleta, 2009). Universities have established themselves as local representatives of universal knowledge (Pietsch, 2013).

The “decolonisation of the curriculum” project

Under this section, we cover the popular understanding of the concept of decolonisation and some approaches followed already to develop a transformed curriculum for universities. We realised that there is a focus in many literatures on decolonisation as a definitive solution to HE transformation. However, currently, we ask ourselves if this is really enough.

Perceived decolonised curriculum agenda in South African higher education

The current pressure and centrality of HE transformation in South Africa on decolonisation of the curriculum arguably suggest that it is the solution to all HE dilemmas. The outcomes from a series of debates on the subject have birthed different approaches. Suggested approaches vary from changing the content to a complete deconstruction and reconstruction of the curriculum so as to change the purpose of the curriculum, change the notions of assessment, change the ways in which learning is weighted and measured etc. The advocating by students and activists almost portrays that, once the curriculum is decolonised, depending on what it means, all other curriculum-related challenges associated with design, development, implementation and management – such as technology integration, low throughput, access, cognitive justice, student performance, student retention and employable graduates, et cetera – would disappear.

The HE transformation agenda, just like the HE curriculum, is broad with diverse imperatives. The route via the current agenda of decolonisation of the curriculum is one approach – a small piece of the pie with necessary impact to the bigger picture. It is necessary to consider that the curriculum in HE, just like in any other level of education, is highly influenced by the social,

physical, economic and cultural environment, both nationally and internationally. This implies that the context of these influencers affects what is incorporated in the curriculum design and development and subsequently determines how the curriculum should be implemented for it to be relevant. This suggests the need for curriculum contextualisation – a concept beyond curriculum content for those who own it. Therefore, a rethink on content verification and pedagogic methodologies is simply not enough for transformation. We explore what the concept of curriculum contextualisation means for the creators and consumers of the HE curriculum in a later section.

Popular approaches to “decolonise the curriculum” in South Africa

The obvious reflection from the review of the different approaches suggested by scholars and other interest groups is that the approaches are guided by their perception which consistently breathes the rejection or deconstruction of Eurocentric worldviews into the South African HE curriculum. Some examples are seen in the various academic projects in cognate fields, such as natural sciences and engineering, social sciences and humanities, law, and medicine (cf. Soudien, 2015): for example, programs such as the global citizenship and social justice initiative at the University of Cape Town (UCT); the University of Western Cape (UWC) with the emergence of indigenous medicines centers; the NWU developed a decolonisation declaration that empowers faculties to use different approaches based on the nature of the discipline and also developed a multilingual project that saw the integration of Setswana and Sesotho as languages of instruction; and the University of Limpopo (UL) incorporated the use of Sepedi in the undergraduate curriculum (Soudien, 2015).

To some scholars, decolonisation of the curriculum is all about the change in nature and identity of a university and the dismantling of all structures that

support the continuity of colonial legacy (CHE, 2017). A similar view was shared by Higher Education South Africa (HESA) (2014) when it sounded the quest for relevance which encouraged universities to undertake change that entailed de-colonising, de-racialising, de-masculinising and de-gendering the institutions as well as the methodology, scholarship, teaching and learning, and pedagogy. Other schools of thought focus on what is taught, and this appears to be the dominant ideology of most activists. This group focuses on the need to Africanise or indigenise the syllabus (CHE, 2017). This suggests the replacement of texts by white or Eurocentric scholars with those who are not. This view can honestly be perceived as an attack on white academics by black academics and students in a mixed-racial country like South Africa, resurrecting the injustices of the past (Mgqwashu, 2018).

Etheridge (2018) and Kaya and Seleti (2013) argue that a decolonised curriculum must reject the utilization of dominant Western worldviews of knowing and knowledge production as the only way of knowing. In whatever form these views are expressed, it must be emphasised that they are in no way promoting that decolonisation of the curriculum entails the removal of white men or women from the curriculum as opinions may suggest (Heleta, 2016; Ruddock, 2018). It is widely understood by scholars in South Africa that proposing the chasing of anything European from the curriculum would suggest the solving of discernment by discerning, which is an indication that South Africans have not learnt anything from apartheid. As such, to level playing field for everyone, black or white, local or Western, Etheridge (2018) underscores that the idea is not to do away with things that worked well and are still working and replacing them with local; it is about excluding content that serves a colonial agenda and replacing such content with local content for national relevance. This communicates a sense of focus on the purpose. This means whatever is relevant to the purpose of HE or a program, irrespective of the worldview, stays.

Other schools of thought views decolonisation of the curriculum as bringing Africa fully to the center of knowledge in African universities (Mbembe, 2018). This perspective highlights the need to create opportunities for African content and knowledge, which have been relegated to the periphery, so that they have a legitimate space in the center (Ruddock, 2018). This suggests the expansion of African worldviews – making Africa’s lifeworlds the center of African universities (Ngugi, 1981). The shortfall may be the availability and applicability of African life-worlds to all disciplines or knowledge, considering the strong debate on the lack of documentation of Africa’s life-worlds in some disciplines.

Fataar (2018) feels that focusing on and considering only all the above-mentioned approaches – including the exemplary activities at a few universities to develop a decolonial approach – are mostly at the level of ideas, symbols and politics. He advocates for the debate to be escalated to focus on the terms of the knowledge and curriculum veracity of the decolonial approach. This implies that the discussion should focus on what counts as knowledge based on a decolonial approach. Deep reflection on most of the above-mentioned approaches highlights the need to look at the understanding of concept of curriculum in order to develop a shared understanding of how to decolonise and transform the HE Sector. A common place to start could be to first reposition the understanding of the concept of curriculum: it means more than just syllabus, content and methods, and it includes students, lecturers and more importantly, context. To understand curriculum, one should bring together the theory and social actions in a dialectical relationship (Grundy 1987). A plausible approach to decolonise the curriculum would consider all the components of a curriculum. It is with this understanding that we suggest the need to recontextualise the HE curriculum bearing in mind all the components of a curriculum and the purpose of HE. Such an approach foregrounds the ideological nature of the curriculum and

questions the interest and values embedded in educational institutions and their curricula. It also supports a transformative rather than an adaptive reform process.

Institutional rollout plans to decolonise the curriculum

As complex as the understanding of and approaches to the whole notion of decolonisation, so too is the rollout plan to practically implement the ideologies. We present some examples from top-rated South African universities (SU, NWU, and RU) on their plans.

According to Etheridge (2018), SU is getting decolonisation of the curriculum done by supplementing the knowledge, research and perspectives from Western countries with those from South Africa and Africa. Stellenbosch students would thus have prescribed learning material from local and regional sources for analysis, discussion and assessment purposes alongside international academic sources. The university claims that the output of South African researchers and the relevance of their work are important to the curriculum project. Therefore, they focus on looking at the big picture – local and international – rather than throwing out. This global approach includes considering content from the Middle East, Far East and South America (Etheridge, 2018). The idea is to afford students the opportunity to interrogate academic material from multiple sources, compare and substantiate their findings with analyses and/or empirical research.

After the student protests in 2015, NWU published its declaration on the decolonisation of university education in 2018. What is clear in this declaration is to not provide specific examples, guidelines, frameworks and rules for faculties/discipline to follow. The declaration explicitly declares that matters on the subject are to be contextualised and reach maturity at faculty level (NWU, 2018). As regards teaching and learning, curriculum transformation on social justice, -inclusion and andragogy and language

curriculum design access are key. This would apply to “its academic programmes, and its approaches to, and methods of teaching, learning and assessment in its lecture halls, laboratories and other teaching venues in a differentiated manner” (p. 3). It is expected that faculties would work according to this declaration to maturity with the power to determine curriculum changes. The respective academic faculties are to detail their plans within a five-year span these changes to programmes or disciplines. In view of this, considerations to change education at NWU are centered on shifting focus in Africa on how to select, develop and communicate knowledge.

At RU, the Equity and Institutional Office convened a conference – (Re)Making the South African University: Curriculum Development and the Problem of Place – in April 2015 and later, a series of curriculum conversations by the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL), which to date are still hosted at the university. At the conference, students' discontent arose with regard to what they were taught and how the teaching was conducted, reaching a conclusion that it was time to decolonise the university and curriculum (Vorster, 2016). The curriculum conversation was to showcase ideas on how to decolonise university education by inviting scholars who had already started making changes to their teaching practices. These practices have been published so that other academics can consume these initiatives.

So far, most universities have focused on changing content and methods, with little emphasis on context. Perhaps the focus is more on content and methods because context is always taken into consideration when developing the curriculum of programs. However, with increase drive to promote access to HE and employment equity, there has been a drastic change in the institutional context as regards staff and student profile. The

national and international contexts have also changed significantly. The political-, social- and economic scenario of South Africa has drastically changed since 1994. There is need to reflect on and align the curriculum of universities with the needs of this new political, social and economic dispensation in order to ensure effective curriculum responsiveness, curriculum relevance and graduate employability. Moreover, in our opinion, the response by most institutions to the call for decolonisation of the curriculum cannot be rushed. There is need for both collective and individual effort. Hence, as we collaboratively work toward shared frameworks to transform HE, there is need for individual liberation on the part of students, lecturers and other stakeholders (Fanon, 1961).

The idea of adding new content on African worldviews to the existing curriculum and reducing European views is challenged as the solution to decolonizing the curriculum in South African universities. This approach is envisaged to still promote the status quo (Garuba, 2015; Heleta, 2016). It is considered as keeping Eurocentric views and adding bits and pieces of African worldviews. Heleta (2016) condemn this approach and regards it as ticking the box under the pretense of reforming and transforming. Moreover, the approach of mixing the curriculum content is quite challenging, as it becomes complicated to agree on the volume of African worldviews to be added, since the focus has not been on the goal of education but the composition of the content. Moreover, this does not necessarily change the content per se, and it is unknown as to what the extent such changes are accepted.

It is also reasonable to reflect on whether the volume would be guided by the availability of the worldviews or otherwise. This argument is in no way challenging the existence of African worldviews, but we must also accept that the volume of available African worldviews is not the same across disciplines, and there are some disciplines that have nothing or have not yet proclaimed

those who own the views. This may be ascribed to the prolonged dominance of Eurocentric ideologies over African worldviews in some disciplines. Due to the complexities involved in this approach, Heleta (2016) advocated for what Garuba (2015) described as the rethinking of how the object of the study in South African universities is formed, then reconstructing it and generating the required decolonised curriculum. Complete consciousness during this process is important (Casaire, 2000).

Findings and discussion

Contextualising the curriculum for relevance

The argument presented here does not condemn decolonisation of the curriculum in South Africa and should in no way be seen in that light; the concern is the approach of understanding and using the concept of decolonisation of the curriculum as synonymous to transformation in HE. We are of the view that that approach only partly addresses the problems in South African HE that motivated the transformation agenda. We feel the approach is being rushed for political expediency and that they are too narrow in focus. Effort and resources should be strategically invested in it. Moreover, because of the political association of the decolonisation philosophy in South Africa and the link of the philosophy to the emotional past of South Africa under apartheid, the essence of decolonizing the curriculum in the HE transformation agenda can be derailed. We should look beyond decolonisation of the curriculum in the transformation agenda. As a nation and the HE community, we should aim for approaches that can realise the decolonised curriculum while simultaneously addressing other HE challenges such as responsiveness, cognitive justice, curriculum relevance, graduate employability, low throughput, access, ICT integration, diversity across all levels of the curriculum, etc which needs to be addressed in order

to achieve the purpose for HE in South Africa and for us to have a transformed HE. We suggest the application of a contextualised and inclusive curriculum as a key instrument in the transformation of HE and not just a decolonised curriculum.

It is plausible to think that the enterprise to incorporate South African and African worldviews into the curriculum of HE in South Africa suggests the application of contextualisation of the curriculum as an aspect of decolonisation. However, decolonisation should rather be seen as an aspect of contextualisation and not the other way around. A decolonised curriculum is one of the end-products of a contextualised curriculum. A decolonised curriculum considers context as an aspect of decolonisation and focuses on the context in terms of African worldview (African content) integration or knowledge ownership, whereas the curriculum is more than just content and that should inform the needed transformation in HE.

Jacobs, Vakalisa and Gawe (2016) suggest five important components of a curriculum: outcomes/objectives, context, content, methods, and assessment. However, the significance of context is that it informs all the other components. There are several contextual filters (Stark, 2000) which, if carefully considered (in the design and redesign and development of the South African HE curriculum, considering contextualisation), would impact beyond just changing content. Changing content is seen as adding African worldviews, reducing, or completely deleting Eurocentric views, or mixing both in an undecided proportion. Contextual filters referred to here are student characteristics or diversities, student goals, external influences, program goals, university goals, pragmatic factors, pedagogical literature, professional support on curriculum stages, facilities, and opportunities (Oneill, 2015). Contextual factors fit into four levels (i.e. international, national, institutional and program or discipline). It is, however, challenging

to understand the influence of these contextual factors across these levels because they are ever-changing and are unique to a program, time, place and the persons involved. It is interesting to know that they can guarantee curriculum ownership and produce graduates who can contribute to the development of South Africa and integrate South Africa into the global context. By implication, the development of a curriculum with local, national and international significance and ownership is needed.

Towards an inclusive and contextualised curriculum in higher education in South Africa

The South African HE sectors and universities today comprise and attract multiple cultures as a result of the continuous socio-economic and cultural changes in the globalised world. It is logical to expect that South African universities would need to train individuals with cognitive and social skills to prepare them to face the reality of everyday life (Bagarukayo & Kalema, 2015; World Economic Forum [WEF], 2017). However, this is hardly the case in the HE Sector. In South Africa, the HE curriculum can be regarded as having a normative and prescriptive perspective without an agenda to cover the different interests of the students participating in the process and immediate communities (Botha, 2009). Perhaps this is why most activists for decolonisation of the curriculum constantly reproach the HE curriculum as foreign or westernised. Of even greater concern is the fact that the curriculum is considered as focusing on the accumulation and reproduction of knowledge from the perspective of a uniform curriculum prescribed by the apartheid regime (Masemula, 2013). By implication, the curriculum is designed to teach students what to think and not how to think. Nevertheless, it would be good to have an educational paradigm shift in the direction capable of providing students with the abilities and competencies to serve the South African society and Africa in general.

The concept of contextualisation may be a means to produce better students for the economy of South Africa and their immediate communities in such a way that the curriculum in terms of content, design and delivery, and assessment is rebranded.

Shifting towards inclusive curriculum development

Our view on the shift toward an inclusive curriculum is guided by the following quote:

“... Don’t want to stand out as different yet want to be recognised as individuals.” (Hockings, 2010)

From this quote, we deduce that, in order to contextualise the curriculum as part of the HE transformation project, there is need to recognise the diversity of students, staff and difference in the institutional and provincial contexts in South Africa. This does not suggest that we label students, staff and people from other universities in the different provinces of South Africa as different in terms of skin colour, race, culture, status, performance and institutional rankings; we must recognise their individuality and what makes them unique contextually when we design and develop the curriculum of programs at universities, hence our approach of an inclusive curriculum as key to the HE transformation agenda in South Africa.

The renewed focus on inclusion and equity in HE in South Africa is paramount and is known to potentially improve retention and graduation rates and the overall quality of education (Blessinger, Sengupta & Makhunya, 2019). Despite this, little literature is available on how to design the HE curriculum to be inclusive (Morgan & Houghton, 2011). Before zooming deep into the curriculum design of an inclusive curriculum, it is important to note that there are two important issues that inform the creation of the culture of inclusion in HE. They include the need to humanise HE and improve social justice, which is currently contestably invincible in HE in SA.

As reported by scholars, the current HE curriculum has failed to give recognition to the diversity of all students (Oneill, 2015). The current HE curriculum is in reality characterised by exclusivity and includes racism, sexism, elitism, supremacism, hegemony, bigotry, and so forth. Such exclusivity is reflected in all the curriculum components and shape the structure, culture and agency of universities. To turn this around, the focus on decolonizing the curriculum – which is understood to be content and pedagogical change – is not enough. To make the curriculum more inclusive and reflective of humanistic values, there is a need to integrate multiculturalism and the human rights of freedom of expression and participation in the curriculum of universities.

As learning is a social process, it is important to integrate social interactions and social norms into the design of the HE curriculum. There is need to ensure that the structure, culture and agency of universities create a sense of belonging and wellbeing. Considering the diversity of students and staff at South African universities, it is only logical that learning activities foster collaboration and embrace group and individual identities. Blessinger, Sengupta and Mandla (2019), emphasizing a holistic approach to developing an inclusive curriculum in HE, suggest that universities must be ready to accept the reality of full participation, including students, teaching and support staff, management, industries, local rulers, and indigenous people in society.

Curriculum for internationalisation and globalisation amid transformation

As stated earlier, O’Neil (2015) lists four important levels (international, national, institutional and program or discipline) that should inform considerations to contextualise the curriculum. At the international level, the

heart of contextualising the curriculum is to promote internationalisation through ensuring the international relevance of the curriculum. The need for internationalisation of teaching and research serve as a critical objective to drive transformation in HE across the world (Kishun, 2007). Internationalisation raises the quality standards and global relevance of tertiary institutions. It also attracts the best students and staff, creating revenue, pushing the boundaries of knowledge through research, and promoting internal diversity (Kishun, 2007).

As regards the internationalisation of HE, South Africa recorded an exceptional rating when they became the only African country, alongside the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and Canada, where inbound mobile students exceed outbound mobile students (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2009). This might change for the worse if universities succeed with the current light which decolonisation of the curriculum is seen.

It cannot be overemphasised that the governments of countries worldwide see education as a major contributor to national wealth and economic development. However, one cannot undermine the challenge of keeping up with the needed continuous improvement of the quality assurance standard and the increasingly competitive external environment. It has become imperative for most tertiary institutions to maintain global relevance through the internationalisation of teaching, learning and research (Jibeen & Khan, 2015). The chances of realizing this objective in South African HE in the wake of dominant approaches to decolonizing the curriculum may affect university ratings and international relevance.

With the understanding that transformation in HE is imminent, the concern and focus should be on how to transform the HE Sector to become the most significant emerging market for international students with a well-

established relationship between gross domestic product (GDP) growth and tertiary education enrolment.

It is plausible to envisage HE in South Africa and Africa at the center of the education system and research. This suggests HE research that focuses on an Africanised system of teaching and learning and African social dynamics to be undertaken and reported based on an African worldview (CHE, 2018). However, it must also be recognised that a country's research base is a key factor that increasingly determines its international relevance (Jibeen & Khan, 2015). There is no doubt that researching about ourselves to improve ourselves as Africans (Ngugi, 1981) would become popular and attract collaboration in no time, which is a step in the right direction. But equally important in the contextualisation of the curriculum at the international level is to ensure that the research about Africa (and South Africa in context) to improve Africa (and South Africa in particular) also contributes to providing solutions to global challenges and benefits more than just South Africa or Africa. This is what makes it globally relevant.

Moreover, considering that the international context is everchanging, the notion of preparing students for a more complex changing world should be at the forefront of curriculum design and development (O'Neill, 2015). In addition, HE curriculum should be designed taking into consideration the need of a diverse student population in order to attract international students and students from diverse backgrounds.

Considering that one of the main purposes of HE is to link education with the world of work (Thomas, 2005) and to meet the need of society, it is important that the HE curriculum prepares graduates for employability and addresses the skills need of the country. However, it is quite challenging to plan for employment in the curriculum, as the job market, both nationally and internationally, is volatile. Therefore, to ensure the development of a

relevant and contextually responsive curriculum across all levels, institutional leaders should intensify the development of an interdisciplinary curriculum. One way of doing this is through the development of joint degrees. This can be done internationally across different institutions, nationally across universities in South Africa, institutionally across institutions, and even at a program level across different disciplines. This would contribute to an increase in graduate employability and would address the impact of the national and international economic environment on the HE curriculum.

At the national level, a contextualised HE curriculum promotes the development of programs that recognise institutional differences beyond the simple classification of universities in South Africa to include staff, students and resource differences. We emphasise the need to develop policies that promote institutional criteria for the development and accreditation of programs that recognise the individuality of the institution, the geographical location of the institution and the staff and student profiles of the institutions. In addition, quality assurance policies should also be developed based on institutional differences. As regards the growing use of technology, student and staff learning experience, the cultures, languages and the history of certain groups or races have been underrepresented in HE. For example, students from lower socio-economic groups are underrepresented in HE. However, institutions are developing a number of initiatives to promote access and provide support to groups in transit to and within HE. However, more needs to be done to provide cognitive justice to this group.

Institutionally, every HE institution in South Africa has its own social and historical context which has shaped the culture of the institution. The social and historical context also greatly influences how the curriculum is designed, developed and implemented locally. Institutions should develop policies taking into consideration their institutional contexts when responding to

national drivers and context. They should also look at curriculum projects that can influence the design and development of programs in different faculties. Resources at different faculties and schools within particular institutions differ. The nature, experience and number of teaching staff also differ and influence the curriculum of the faculties and institution. It is suggested that these influencers be consciously considered; these differences at various institutions cannot be ignored.

As regards discipline, a contextualised HE curriculum recognises that HE programs are situated in disciplines and cognate disciplines (O'Neill & Mc Namara, 2015). As much as it is important to consider the discipline in the design and development of curriculum programs, there is also need to consider different worldviews of knowledge in different disciplines, paying attention to the knowledge owner, how it is taught and by whom and in the process be guided by the goal of the discipline and that of the institution and HE for national and international relevance. Moreover, there is need to maintain strong yet permeable disciplinary boundaries in HE (Neuman, 2001). This would promote career migration and employability.

Lastly, a contextualised HE curriculum also emphasises the consideration of a pedagogical context in which universities and stakeholders have to pay attention to the need to educate students not only in disciplines but also in terms of the skills associated with collaborative-, cooperative- and self-directed learning. This may lead to the manifestation of graduate attributes or critical cross-field outcomes. The old idea of a traditional university involved content being memorised by and transferred to students; a pedagogical shift was needed. Lecturers are now expected to play a facilitating role in the teaching and learning process so that they guide and support students toward self-directedness, actualization and autonomy to become responsible and intellectual citizens. This is echoed in an African

philosophy, episteme of intellectual reflection, called “*onuma*.” This means that students should reach a stage where they can be regarded as well-rounded, broadly orientated intellectuals with the capacity to embark on a lifelong, values-oriented path of interaction with knowledge and views about reality and their application to various contexts (NWU, 2016:4).

Conclusion

Transformation in HE in South Africa cannot be limited to decolonizing the curriculum through a mere reconsideration of curriculum content to be learnt and methods of teaching and learning. Thought should be given to contextualizing the curriculum to ensure national and international relevance and internal and external responsiveness. Program or discipline and institutional, national and international contexts influence the curriculum planning process, and therefore any planning for curriculum change or transformation should consider these contexts, especially since they are ever-changing. Contextualizing the curriculum at an international level ensures that South Africa and Africa’s tertiary education maintains a high standard of teaching, research, catering for the needs of domestic and international audiences, on the one hand, and contributing to resolving global research challenges, on the other hand.

It is important that education leaders reflect consciously on the contextual filters that influence curriculum decisions (e.g. the general purpose of HE, national goals, student characteristics, student goals, discipline goals, institutional goals, pragmatic factors, pedagogical literature, facilities and opportunists, among others) to transform HE. Lastly, curriculum design should include all stakeholders that are affected by the curriculum so as to build education for change.

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