

Perspectives on  
**CURRICULUM  
AS PRACTICE**

Implications for Higher Education Pedagogy



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Xolani D Khohliso  
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Perspectives on  
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Xolani D. Khohliso

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## **THIS BOOK WAS DOUBLE BLIND PEER REVIEWED**

This book has undergone rigorous double-blind peer review by independent experts in the field. The peer-review process was conducted in accordance with the publisher's guidelines, and the final decision to publish this book was based on its scholarly merits and relevance to the field.

## Research justification

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This book, based on original research and scholarship, explores curriculum design, learning, and teaching innovations within the context of a transforming and decolonising higher education system. In response to increasing globalisation, technological advances, and the massification of higher education, traditional approaches are being questioned. There is a growing need to move beyond viewing the curriculum as a simple selection of content to understanding it as an "educational experience" (Pinar et al., 1995). University teachers from various institutions contribute to this volume, reflecting critically on the process of responsive re-curriculation and its role in developing key skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. The chapters collectively offer valuable insights into how both educators and students can be better equipped to meet the challenges of 21st-century higher education.

Chapters were solicited through an open call for abstracts, inviting submissions that addressed the key themes of curriculum transformation, learning, and teaching. With support from Axiom Academic Publishers, the editors reviewed all submissions and selected 11 abstracts that aligned with the book's core focus. Authors of the selected abstracts were then invited to submit full chapters, which were handled through the publisher's online peer review management system.

The chapter selection process was driven by the relevance of each submission to the book's themes, the quality of the research, and its overall coherence with the book's goals. After an initial plagiarism check, the editors reviewed each chapter, providing detailed feedback to ensure they met the required standards before initiating peer review.

Each chapter underwent a double-blind peer review by two or, in some cases, three expert reviewers. Reviewers provided thorough feedback,

and authors were required to revise their chapters accordingly, documenting all changes in a Detailed Change Log. The revised chapters were then re-evaluated by the editors to ensure that the feedback had been addressed and that the chapters aligned with the book's objectives. This review process was conducted through the publisher's online system, ensuring a transparent and rigorous procedure.

The editorial process involved several rounds of review, beginning with the editors' initial assessments, which focused on quality and thematic coherence. After peer review, the editors performed a final check to ensure that the chapters were integrated cohesively and maintained consistency throughout the book. This approach ensured that every chapter contributed meaningfully to the book's overall aims.

By engaging in this comprehensive process, the book achieves a high level of academic integrity and rigour. Focusing on the shift from content acquisition to the development of key skills, this volume provides valuable insights for educators and students alike, preparing them for the evolving challenges of higher education and a rapidly changing job market.

**Editors:**

Xolani David Khohliso and Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mgqwashu

# Table of contents

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Acknowledgements .....	xiv
About the editors.....	xv
Preface .....	xvii
Foreword.....	xx

## CHAPTER 1

Emmanuel M Mgqwashu and Xolani D. Khohliso

### **CURRICULUM AS PRAXIS IN THE AGE OF COLONIALITY:**

<b>IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	2
1.2 Education for public good: A concept we hate to love.....	5
1.3 Coloniality: Impact on education .....	12
1.4 The impact of coloniality on pedagogy .....	14
1.5 Reading to Learn: A pedagogy for the common good.....	16
1.6 Conclusion .....	24
1.7 References.....	25

## CHAPTER 2

Mochina Mphuthi, Brenton Fredericks, and Xolani D Khohliso

### **MULTILINGUALISM: AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY TO ENHANCE HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM**

<b>PRACTICE .....</b>	<b>31</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	32
2.2 Aim and Problem Statement .....	33
2.2.1. The Population, Interest, Context (PICO) Framework .....	35
2.2.2. Current understandings on Multilingualism .....	36

2.3	Conceptual lens .....	38
2.3.1.	Multilingualism and Relevance .....	39
2.4	Methodology and Design .....	40
2.4.1.	Inclusion and exclusion criteria .....	40
2.4.2.	Search strategy and terms .....	41
2.4.3.	Ethical considerations in literature review.....	42
2.4.4.	Data analysis .....	43
2.5	Results and discussion.....	44
2.5.1.	Thematic analysis of the summary of articles .....	46
2.5.2.	Theoretical Implications .....	49
2.6	Strategies and limitations .....	51
2.6.1.	Strategies for implementing Multilingualism .....	51
2.6.2.	Limitations to the implementation of Multilingualism .....	53
2.7	Concluding thoughts .....	53
2.8	References .....	55

## **CHAPTER 3**

Maele Mononyane and Molaodi Tshelane

### **ADVANCING PEDAGOGICAL TRANSFORMATIVE VOICES FROM THE PERIPHERIES: THE ROLE OF CRITICAL THINKING, CREATIVITY AND PROBLEM-SOLVING IN THE CURRICULUM.... 60**

3.1	Introduction.....	61
3.2	Reflections on transforming curriculum practice .....	65
3.3	Pedagogies for critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving.....	67
3.4	Methodology .....	69
3.4.1.	Africana Critical Theory - Participatory Action Research .....	70
3.5	Discussion of findings .....	72
3.5.1.	Pedagogies for critical thinking, self-reflection, and active knowledge participation .....	73
3.5.2.	Textual analysis .....	74

3.5.3.	Ideological and power dynamics .....	75
3.5.4.	Social structural level analysis .....	76
3.5.5.	Discursive level analysis .....	78
3.5.6.	Fostering curricula that empower learner identity, voice, and agency in learning paths .....	79
3.5.7.	Textual and spoken word level analysis .....	80
3.5.8.	Social structural level analysis .....	82
3.5.9.	Discursive level analysis .....	83
3.6	Conclusion .....	85
3.7	References .....	86

## **CHAPTER 4**

Pulane A Molomo

### **THE PLACE OF KNOWLEDGE, GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE 21ST-CENTURY HIGHER EDUCATION**

<b>CURRICULUM.....</b>	<b>90</b>
4.1	Introduction..... 91
4.2	Literature Review..... 93
4.2.1.	Curriculum for all .....93
4.2.2.	Graduate attributes and technology.....98
4.2.3.	Graduate attributes and their value .....101
4.2.4.	Knowledge of the curriculum and social benefits.....104
4.2.5.	The workplace .....106
4.2.6.	A General Grouping of Graduate Attributes .....109
4.3	Theoretical framework ..... 115
4.4	Research design..... 116
4.5	Findings ..... 117
4.6	Discussion..... 119
4.7	Conclusion ..... 122
4.8	References ..... 124



## CHAPTER 5

Emmanuel M Mqgwashu

### **RETHINKING SUPPORT FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS IN THE CONTEXT OF A DECOLONISING HIGHER EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS ..... 133**

5.1	Introduction.....	134
5.2	The research context.....	138
5.2.1.	Selected ideas shaping FTLS ADs work .....	143
5.2.2.	Theoretical lens to understanding the phenomenon .....	145
5.2.3.	Limitations to an AD's role .....	147
5.2.4.	Re-thinking an Academic Development support strategy ....	150
5.3	A synoptic discussion of findings.....	160
5.3.1.	Institution-wide ADs contributions: broadening debates on pedagogy .....	164
5.4	Concluding reflections.....	168
5.5	References.....	169

## CHAPTER 6

Mochina Mphuthi

### **FOSTERING INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM PRACTICE FOR PRE- SERVICE TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION..... 173**

6.1	Introduction.....	174
6.2	Problem Statement .....	175
6.3	Research question .....	175
6.4	Population Intervention and Context (PICO) Framework .....	176
6.4.1.	PICO framework (Harris <i>et al.</i> , 2018): .....	176
6.5	Research Design and Methodology.....	176
6.5.1.	Theoretical framework .....	177
6.5.2.	Inclusion and exclusion criteria .....	178
6.6	Results and discussion.....	181

6.6.1. Overview of findings .....	181
6.6.2. Thematic analysis of the summary of articles .....	185
6.7 Conclusion .....	191
6.8 Limitations and recommendations.....	192
6.9 References .....	193

## **CHAPTER 7**

Papi A Lemeko

### **STUDENT’S FEEDBACK ON LECTURER ONLINE INSTRUCTION COMPETENCE AT A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY..... 197**

7.1 Introduction.....	198
7.2 Online instruction competency .....	200
7.3 Purpose of the study .....	202
7.4 Conceptual underpinning.....	202
7.5 Methodology .....	204
7.6 Findings .....	206
7.6.1. Section A: Students’ quantitative responses based on a six- point Likert scale.....	207
7.6.2. Section B: Students’ qualitative responses based on narrative themes .....	208
7.7 Discussion and corroboration of findings.....	212
7.8 Conclusion .....	218
7.9 Mapping the future .....	219
7.10 References .....	219

## **CHAPTER 8**

Juanita Jonker

### **FEMALE STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON BEING INCLUDED IN CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION: A CASE STUDY IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION..... 224**

8.1	Introduction.....	225
8.2	Conceptual framework.....	227
8.3	Literature review .....	228
8.4	Methodology .....	233
8.4.1.	Ethical considerations.....	234
8.4.2.	Study design and setting.....	234
8.4.3.	Study population and sampling .....	235
8.4.4.	Recruitment and data collection .....	236
8.4.5.	Data analysis .....	237
8.5	Results .....	237
8.6	Discussion.....	238
8.6.1.	Theme 1: Power dynamics.....	238
8.6.2.	Theme 2: Social structures .....	239
8.6.3.	Theme 3: Knowledge production.....	241
8.6.4.	A transformed curriculum framework from a feminist standpoint.....	244
8.7	Conclusion .....	246
8.8	References.....	247

## CHAPTER 9

Hesta Friedrich-Nel and Ryk Lues

### RESEARCH IMPACT AT SOUTH AFRICAN UOTS: STEPWISE COGNITIVE PROGRESSION IN APPLIED DOCTORAL PEDAGOGY

.....		<b>253</b>
9.1	Introduction.....	254
9.1.1.	From ideation to applied outcome .....	256
9.2	Research design.....	258
9.2.1.	Critical literature survey methodology .....	258
9.2.2.	Design thinking approaches.....	260
9.3	Innovation and research in higher education.....	262
9.3.1.	Institutes of technology .....	262
9.3.2.	Catalysts for global innovation and research.....	263

9.3.3.	South African Universities of Technology .....	264
9.4	Exploring research methodology curricula .....	266
9.4.1.	Conventional research methodology curricula.....	267
9.5	Research in the developing context .....	271
9.6	Applied research: Translating theoretical knowledge into actionable strategies .....	272
9.7	South African perspectives.....	273
9.7.1.	Attributes infused through doctoral pedagogy.....	276
9.7.2.	Contemporary constructs and explorations .....	278
9.8	Creativity and innovation .....	284
9.8.1.	Traits and attributes of creativity.....	285
9.9	Stepwise cognitive progression: A contemporary approach....	287
9.9.1.	Cognitive progression and knowledge acquisition .....	287
9.9.2.	Cognitive progression and analytical competency .....	288
9.9.3.	Cognitive progression and creativity .....	289
9.9.4.	Cognitive progression and adaptability .....	289
9.9.5.	Design enablers .....	290
9.10	Conclusion .....	293
9.11	References .....	296

## **CHAPTER 10**

Bianca N Mkhize-Simelane

### **ASSESSING THE PREPAREDNESS OF NCV TOURISM GRADUATES: A CASE STUDY ON THE ALIGNMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INDUSTRY DEMANDS .....**

**302**

10.1	Introduction.....	303
10.2	Literature review .....	305
10.2.1.	Understanding Curriculum Responsiveness .....	305
10.2.2.	Curriculum Responsiveness in the South African Context....	307
10.2.3.	Foundations of Curriculum Development .....	308
10.2.4.	Evolution of the Tourism Curriculum .....	309

10.2.5. Approaches and Models for Constructing a Tourism Curriculum .....	315
10.2.6. Influence of Ideology on the Tourism Curriculum .....	316
10.2.7. Approaches to Tourism Curriculum Design .....	317
10.2.8. Defining the Curriculum in Tourism Education .....	318
10.2.9. The Influence of Ideology on Tourism Curriculum.....	319
10.2.10. Theoretical Framework.....	321
10.2.11. The Transmission of Tourism Knowledge: Bernstein’s Pedagogic Device .....	323
10.2.12. Tourism Curriculum and the Rules of the Pedagogic Device	323
10.2.13. Distributive Rules.....	323
10.2.14. Implications of Distributive Rules on the TVET Tourism Curriculum .....	324
10.2.15. Recontextualizing Rules and the Curriculum Design Process.....	326
10.2.16. Data Collection Methods .....	330
10.2.17. Document Analysis .....	331
10.2.18. Data Analysis.....	332
10.3 Key Findings.....	341
10.4 Recommendations.....	343
10.5 Conclusion and Limitations .....	345
10.6 References.....	346

## **CHAPTER 11**

Rhea Koch, Jessica Pool and Yolande Heymans

### **GUIDELINES FOR DECOLONISING HIGHER EDUCATION**

#### **CURRICULA: A CASE STUDY IN HEALTH SCIENCES ..... 353**

11.1 Introduction.....	354
11.2 Problem statement and aim.....	354
11.3 Background: Framing the decolonisation of curricula in HPE ..	357
11.4 Research method and design .....	359
11.4.1. Data collection .....	359
11.4.2. Data Analysis.....	362

11.5	Results and Discussion .....	362
11.5.1.	THEME 1: Recognise and challenge colonialism. ....	363
11.5.2.	THEME 2: Combat injustice and strive for socially just, culturally diverse, and inclusive education. ....	370
11.5.3.	THEME 3: Re-embrace cultural heritage.....	377
11.5.4.	THEME 4: Challenge conventional knowledge and explore alternatives .....	381
11.6	Guidelines for advancing decolonisation .....	386
11.7	Conclusion .....	391
11.8	Limitations.....	391
11.9	References.....	392

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**Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mqgwashu** is a National Research Foundation Rated Researcher and Professor in Education, with specialisation in Higher Education studies. He held his first leadership role in 2009 when he became the Head of the School of Languages, Literacies, Media and Drama Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Education Faculty. Just before joining North-West University, he served at Rhodes University as Head of the Education Department, and later as the Deputy Dean in the Education Faculty. He then became a Director in the Centre for Teaching and Learning, at North-West University. Since 2022, he is the Director for, and pioneer of, a brand-new Centre for Higher Education Professional Development at North-West University where he leads the development of PGDips, Master's and PhD qualifications for the professionalisation of academics as university teachers. Professor Mqgwashu also serves as an Editorial Board Member for *Academic Literacy Journal*, as well as *Journal of Modern Educational Research*. He previously served as Associate Editor for the *Reading & Writing: Journal of the Reading Association*. His scholarly work includes a Co-investigator role in a research project called *Access and Inclusion in Higher Education* with a focus on ways in which disciplinary discourses and pedagogic practices across disciplines in higher education serve to include and exclude students. This project involved academic staff across 18 universities. His latest project, in which he was one of the Lead researchers in South Africa, involved 5 institutions: University of Johannesburg, University of Bristol, University of Fort-Hare, the University of Brighton and Rhodes University. The project is called *The influence of rurality on student trajectories through higher education: a view from the South* that began from 2017 – 2020. The project was investigating how students negotiate the transition from school and home in rural contexts to 'university learning'. A book entitled *Rural Transitions to Higher Education in South Africa: Decolonial Perspectives* (2021) was published by Routledge.

## Preface

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Universities, internationally, are no longer dealing with a socio culturally homogenous cohort of students. The continuing massification of Higher Education, including social inclusion, widening access and lifelong learning, has meant that universities need to re-evaluate their identities and core business. This is to be carried out in the light of attempts to address *their under-preparedness* for a diverse cohort of students. In South Africa, such a cohort includes the majority of the student body who is first in their families to enter Higher Education, and are thus non-traditional students. To that effect, Higher Education has a task to ensure that not only some students experience it as a continuation of home literacies, while for others who bring literacies unfamiliar to the university are either not recognised or rewarded.

Against this background, the point of this book is that if this situation is not systemically addressed, universities can end up producing skewed educational outcomes in favour of students from white and black middle-class, educated backgrounds. Historically under-represented or non-traditional students often belong to minority groups (those of lower socio-economic status generally from rural contexts, villages and Black townships, first-in-family or studying part-time, for example). These changes in the university cohorts of students are inevitable, and in fact timely and necessary. After all, Higher Education Institutions are funded through the taxes that the general public pays. This makes them public institutions into which all sections of society should (as a matter of principle), have equal access.

Curriculum reform and the resultant learning and teaching processes form a major part in the facilitation of this access both in terms of entering the university, but most crucially, epistemological access necessary to acquire the knowledge resources necessary for societal critique, as well as material success. For this book, curriculum is

understood beyond just topics to be covered. The understanding includes asking questions and providing answers on which texts are drawn upon to tackle these topics, as well as questions about: Who does the teaching? How is the teaching carried out? Who does the learning? How is the classroom set out? Who does the speaking in class? What behaviours, including reading and writing practices, are permitted? Which behaviours are seen as appropriate and inappropriate? From whose world view are answers to these questions? In addition to all these dimensions of the curriculum, the book also acknowledges that learning can happen outside the formally planned curriculum, and that conversations at home, in residences, and experiences on the sports field also have consequences for student learning.

In attempting to explore these questions and ongoing conversations around the nature of the curriculum as praxis, the book engages in debates on the extent to which individuals and groups draw on very different ideas about what should or can constitute curriculum development, the resultant learning and teaching. In line with Pinar, *et al* (1995), this book sees curriculum as an interdisciplinary study of educational experience. Each chapter explores this understanding, variously showing ways in which educational experience implies more than just the topics covered in a course, the prescribed readings, and such like.

By means of various strategies, each chapter presents a view that curriculum is a phenomenon that encompasses the attitudes, values, dispositions and world views that get learned, un-learned, re-learned, re-formed, deconstructed and reconstructed by students and university teachers alike. In the process, the book offers instances where curriculum as praxis is foregrounded. As each chapter attempts to illustrate, praxis creates conditions to democratise learning spaces. It makes room for both individual and group identities within learning and

teaching context to be heard, appreciated and included in the process of generating knowledge, skills and attitudes. Selected case studies presented in this book enable a critical entry into the theoretical foundations that inform curriculum as praxis.

To this end, at a conceptual level, the book can be categorised into three sections, with chapters two to four, five to seven, and eight to ten forming three individually coherent categories focussing on pedagogies, learning and assessment. The first and the final chapters, on the other hand, set the context from which the next nine chapters emerge and respond, and uses health sciences as a case study to propose strategies to explore decolonising higher education curricula, respectively.

**Editors:**

Xolani David Khohliso and Emmanuel Mfanafuthi Mqwashu

## Foreword

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Curriculum is not neutral and is more than just content! Jansen<sup>1</sup> (2019) argues that curriculum reflects power structures that often prioritize Western knowledge systems over African knowledge systems. This implies that what is included or excluded in the curriculum is a political act, predetermining whose knowledge is deemed legitimate and valuable. With the advent of democracy in South Africa, legislation was put in place to transform higher education institutions to provide access to previously marginalized groups into universities, transform university curriculum and institutional cultures. This led to massification and the presence of diverse student groups at higher education institutions. Although these changes at higher education institutions were underpinned by the notion of transformation, epistemic access (access to knowledge) for most students remains elusive and inclusion of other knowledge systems slow. The 2015-2016 students protest in South Africa revealed how most black students experienced alienation due to institutional cultures and western dominated curriculum particularly at historically white institutions which has resulted in poor educational outcomes (low success rates). For majority of South African students (particularly first-generation students) higher education qualifications is the ticket that will enable economic empowerment. However, the demands from the job market and the evolution of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) including Artificial Intelligence (AI) calls for responsive curricula that would enable university graduates to possess different skills and competencies. In the context of these diverse expectations, there is a need for academics and academic developers reflect on what should count as knowledge, who is taught and how they are taught. Through praxis, academics can go beyond accepting curriculum as content but a set of practices and beliefs that would affect students' being, shape societies and impact education outcomes.

In this book academics from various institutions in South Africa reflect on their engagement with curriculum within their various disciplines and offer insights on how they have approached curriculum reforms and how these influenced pedagogy, assessment and agency (academics and students). The authors demonstrate that curriculum decolonisation encourages the questioning of exclusive concepts and practices with a colonial-leaning. It is through this questioning and reflection that inclusive learning spaces can be created to ensure access with success for all students not only the elite as it has been the norm. A focus on student success evaluates how multilingual approaches can enrich student experiences, creating an inclusive learning environment while supporting students' cognitive and cultural development. The work advocates and supports the decolonial call for the creation of multilingual institutions to ensure a move from alienating institutional cultures towards inclusion of all students. Through the lens of a Multicultural Educational Theory (MET), an argument is put forward for inclusion of diverse knowledge systems to enrich students' learning experiences through professional development and collaboration with communities. The MET provides an opportunity for academics and academic developers to find systemic ways of addressing the exclusion of other knowledge systems at institutions of higher learning.

The introduction of an African Critical Theory in one of the chapters further highlights the need to move from western-based theories that continue to marginalize students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. The application of this theory provides the reader with strategies that can be used to guide the inclusion of student voices in their learning and ways to create an engaging classroom to facilitate student learning, moving away from rote learning and memorization. Student engagement ensures that within a rapidly evolving world, students are supported in their learning to develop competencies such as critical thinking skills. This aligns with the need to go beyond

knowledge but place graduate attributes and technology at the centre of student learning. The importance student voice is further highlighted through evaluation of online teaching, the importance of planning and preparation emerge as important components that students consider as important drivers for effective online learning. This book further highlights the need to recognize and place emphasis on listening to voices from all genders when student feedback is solicited. The process of curriculum renewal processes should create opportunities for all voices to be heard. The focus should be on students (their experiences should shape the type of institutions we want), communities (to include different knowledge systems) and industries (to ensure responsiveness to the world of work). It is understood that curriculum renewal should not deviate from the mission of different universities in terms of the type of knowledge produced. For universities globally, institutions, funders and the government expect knowledge produced to translate into outcomes that would have socio-economic benefit. A cognitive stepwise approach is proposed to advocate for translation of empirical findings into practical outcomes, this ensures university's responsiveness to societal needs. In responding to societal needs, there should be recognition that other institutions of higher learning play a critical role in developing societies and this should translate in collaboration and development of curriculum that not only develop students for the world of work but enable articulation between institutions. Careful considerations are therefore required when developing or renewing curricula to ensure a balance between theory and practical components, this will not only ensure graduate employability but will enable movement across institutions.

Higher Education institutions globally grapple with expectations of the continuously evolving world of work. The need to create inclusive institutions of higher learning for diverse students in the context of a massified higher education is echoed globally. To create inclusive higher

education institutions that are responsive to industrial and societal needs, diverse knowledge systems should inform curricula. Beyond the balance between theoretical and practical content, engagement and critical reflection on what counts as knowledge, who is taught, how they are taught, is needed to ensure students develop the skills, competencies and attributes to thrive in society. This book highlights that the academic project in higher education is complex cannot be resolved through a one-size-fits-all approach. It provides practical strategies (informed by praxis) to academic developers on how they can work with academics for meaningful curriculum transformation. For academics, the chapters provide insights on theories and practices (praxis) that should be considered when developing or renewing curricula working with academic developers. This is a timely resource; the authors and editors should be commended for this.

Prof Ntsoaki Malebo

Senior Director

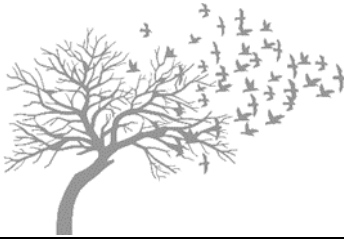
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## CHAPTER 1

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# Curriculum as praxis in the age of coloniality: implications for pedagogy

*Emmanuel M Mgwashu and Xolani D Khohliso*

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### Abstract

In setting up the context within which formal education is enacted, and from which individual chapters in this book emerge and respond to, this chapter critically reviews the theoretical foundations of the concept ‘education for public good’. As a consistently touted concept, the chapter reveals its analytical and practical limitations, inadequacies and detrimental effects in formal education. Implicit in the concept, the chapter argues, is an unintended perpetuation of coloniality, a phenomenon that continues to ‘devour’ and undermine all well-intentioned postcolonial/post-apartheid educational policies. The chapter concludes with offering a possible alternative: ‘education for common good’, and presents the *Reading to Learn* pedagogy as one of the perspectives on curriculum as praxis. This pedagogy is also presented as compatible to ‘education for common good’, capable of enabling a shift from teaching what to learn, to how to learn.

**Keywords:** curriculum as praxis, education for public good, education for common good, coloniality, Reading to Learn pedagogy.

### 1.1 Introduction

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Across the South African higher education, endless efforts are set in motion to rid the sector of the procedures, values, norms, practices, thinking, beliefs, and choices that appear to be exclusionary. They are seen to be compromising a redefined purpose of the university in line with the transformation and decolonisation imperatives it faces. Practices that lead to the marginalisation and exclusion of the majority of undergraduate and postgraduate students and impose hostile managerial processes that undermine the academic and knowledge generation projects are frowned upon. As would be expected, curriculum reform forms a major part of this work. But what does curriculum actually mean?

The definition of *curriculum* remains a contested terrain. A general and emerging view is that in its broader realisation, it comprises not merely the subjects in a qualification, but also all the aspects that make up a programme of learning (Boughey & Mckenna, 2021). This includes considerations concerning what topics are being taught and texts drawn upon to tackle such topics. Most crucial for this chapter, it also includes questions about: Who does the teaching? How is the teaching carried out? Who does the learning? How is the classroom set out? Who does the speaking in class? What behaviours, including reading and writing practices, are permitted? Which behaviours are seen as appropriate and inappropriate? From whose world view are answers to these questions? In addition to all these dimensions of the curriculum, the definition also acknowledges that learning can happen outside the formally planned curriculum, and that conversations at home, in residences, and experiences on the sports field also have consequences for student learning (Mgqwashu, 2009).

In this broad understanding of curriculum, students are not simply a collection of the skills and attributes they bring into the university.

Instead, they are people with rich histories, languages, norms and values, which may or may not be welcomed into the cultures and structures of university lecture halls, laboratories and libraries. Within this broad framing of curriculum, recent research draws on the work of Maton (2014) to ask three key questions:

- What knowledge is legitimated by the curriculum?
- Which knowers are legitimated by the curriculum?
- How are these knowledges and knowers legitimated in the curriculum?

In a world in which higher education has been viewed largely through the economic lens (that is, higher education should prepare participants for the world of work), the scope and purpose of higher education are narrowed, and in fact threatened (Ashwin, 2020). Indeed, curriculum events cannot mainly focus on providing access to immediate work place skills. This holds the potential for higher education to pay less attention to the underlying principled, abstract and powerful knowledge that could help us solve world problems, critique and interrogate the conditions from which such problems emerge (Mckenna, 2020). As illustrated in various chapters throughout this book, all these aspects form part of what can be considered critical aspects in curriculum work.

As illustrated in the book, curriculum theory is thus seen as cross-disciplinary exploration of educational experiences (Pinar *et al.*, 1995). Educational experience implies more than simply the topics covered in a course; it encompasses the attitudes, values, dispositions and worldviews that get learned, un-learned, re-learned, re-formed, deconstructed and reconstructed while studying towards a university qualification. Thus, what approach to curriculum theory and practice do most South Africa's universities subscribe to? Once again, there is no single answer. In any post-conflict, transforming and decolonising society, this question is critical. It appears that there are four ways of

## CHAPTER 1

approaching curriculum theory and practice (Pinar *et al.*, 1995) These are:

- curriculum as product: certain skills to master and facts to know;
- curriculum as process: the interaction of teachers, students, and knowledge;
- curriculum as context: contextually shaped; and
- curriculum as praxis: practice should not focus exclusively on individuals or exclusively on the group – but must explore how both create understandings and practices.

For the purpose of this chapter and in the context of this book, curriculum as praxis is explored. Praxis creates conditions to democratise learning spaces. It makes room for both individual and group identities within the teaching and learning context. This is the reason the chapter begins with a critical review of the theoretical foundations of the concept '*education for public good*' so as to critique its analytical and practical limitations, inadequacies and detrimental effects in postcolonial, post-conflict societies such as those in South Africa.

In this endeavour, the chapter shows how an uncritical embracing of this concept within the formal education (schooling and post-school) discourse has tended, and continues, to undermine well-meaning educational policies by the democratic government and formal education institutions at the expense of the majority. We use the South African context to illustrate fundamental 'blind spots' that, if unchecked, will continue to cushion coloniality and to privilege the elite and marginalise the majority. Coloniality, a 'condition' that sees everything other than Euro-American and/or White as inferior (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008), is perpetuated (often unwittingly) by the act of uncritically embracing the concept of 'education for public good'. As a 'condition', coloniality 'devours' well-intentioned, politically progressive

(post)colonial educational policies. We argue that colonial influences persist in shaping pedagogical practices, favouring historically privileged social classes, while disadvantaging the historically marginalised majority.

More specifically, the chapter reveals how the capacity to acquire knowledge through reading, a privileged practice in colonial formal education, is a skill the students from literate cultures acquire unconsciously from home, long before they enter formal schooling. This has serious implications for the way we think about educational desire and attainment in the South African context. The chapter then proposes a conceptual shift that must, of necessity, enable us to rid ourselves of pedagogical practices and classroom traditions that are colonial and evolved in the west to favour the elite and marginalise the majority. Pedagogical practices that will rid us of 'coloniality' in particular is the focus of the second section in this chapter. It explores how a shift from education for public good to education for common good could unlock the emancipatory potential of education. We argue that the strength of education for common good engenders cooperation from the government, private sector, educators and policymakers in ways that create conditions for the inclusion and celebration of non-mainstream knowledge-generation traditions, knowledges and learning practices. The *Reading to Learn* pedagogy, which we consider to be compatible with the concept of 'education for common good', is presented to illustrate the power of this alternative to 'education for public good'.

## 1.2 Education for public good: A concept we hate to love

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A critical review of the theoretical foundations of the concept 'education for public good' reveals its limitations and inadequacies – particularly in postcolonial and/or post-conflict societies such as that in

## CHAPTER 1

South Africa. Engagement with this concept from a humanistic perspective reveals the extent to which the democratic governments' uncritical embrace of it often leads to a struggle to undo the negative effects of past-legislated oppression and discrimination. In defining 'public good', Daviet (2016:2–3) reminds us that:

*Generally attributed to Samuelson, who mathematically formalized it (1954, 1955), the standard definition of public good was carved by Musgrave (1941, 1959, 1969). Such definition is very restrictive: a public good, defined as counterpart to a private good, is 'a good whose consumption does not diminish its availability to other consumers' (Samuelson, 1954). The standard theory of public good considers two criteria: non-rivalry (once it is produced for one person, additional consumers can consume it at no additional cost) and non-excludability (a person cannot be prevented from using the good once it has been produced). Given these characteristics, individuals tend to act as 'free riders': they are likely to understate their preferences for these goods to avoid being taxed for their use and to let others pay for them. Consequently, the market cannot adequately estimate the demand and these goods are underprovided. Public goods are therefore considered market failures and justify state provision.*

This mathematically formalised definition of 'public good' seems to fit well with the delivery of social services such as water and electricity, but is completely inappropriate, and in fact problematical if used in relation to formal education through which the young acquire knowledge and skills needed to survive by gaining access to material goods. In terms of the delivery of electricity, for example, residents in affluent suburban areas subsidise those in poor, impoverished contexts within the same metropolitan area. The latter thus pay very little and in some instances nothing to receive such services (Crone, 2010). To uncritically embrace

the definition of ‘education for public good’ as presented above and attempt to operationalise it within the context of education, especially in a country with a history such as that of South Africa, is ludicrous.

Education, at least within the human rights discourse, cannot be seen as a commodity of which provision is determined by market forces and dependent on demand. The assumption which predicates education as a ‘public good’ does not fit into the non-rivalry and non-excludability criteria developed by Daviet (2016). Considering South Africa’s history of colonialism and apartheid, it is instead a right earned and fought for by thousands, many of whom lost their lives. Contrary to the mathematically formalised definition of ‘public good’, education is not and cannot be a privilege to be enjoyed only by those who can afford it. An economic formulation that divorces education from social benefits therefore is problematic. We argue that education is a social tool for emancipation and social redress (DoE, 1997; Freire, 1970; Jansen, 2009). Writing about South Africa, Spaul (2015) presents useful statistics that reveal the extent to which, and the reasons why, education has in fact become a privilege. He does this by presenting the country’s challenge as twofold:

*First, most parents cannot afford the fees at Model C or private schools since they are frequently as high as university fees (ZAR 31,500 a year), and second, there are limited places in these schools. Of the 25,741 schools in South Africa, only 1,135 are former Model C schools and 1,681 are independent (private) schools. Together that accounts for only 11% of [the] total [number of] schools. Even if we abolished fees in all these schools – and I’m not sure that is the way to go – you cannot fit 12 million children into 2,816 schools. (Spaul, 2015:1)*



## CHAPTER 1

In a country in which 89% of schools are dysfunctional, one does not need to go deeper to understand the problem with uncritically adopting slogan-like, politically correct and popular concepts such as ‘education for public good’, without properly examining their implications for the sector. This uncritical embracing ‘legalises’ the privatisation of education, thereby undermining the political work of social redress through education. This is a consequence of ignoring the nebulous and problematic relationship between the commodification of education and the notion of ‘public good’. Realising this, the South African democratic government has attempted to ‘sanitise’ the ‘education for public good’ concept. However, Daviet (2016) points to the underlying competing, and simultaneously contradictory, approaches in these attempts. They involve measures:

*to enlarge the standard theory of public good from within by fuelling it with ethical considerations. This approach explicitly refers to the standard theory of public good while interpreting it loosely: education is considered non-excludable not on technical grounds but on ethical and/or legal ones. The human rights approach falls within this category and provides a rationale for compulsory education. From this perspective, education is an impure public good, since only the criterion of non-excludability is met; the under-provision of education that justifies state intervention is no longer linked to the free rider issue but to private provision. Indeed, given the technical possibility to exclude someone from school attendance, private actors are likely to provide education only for the children whose parents can pay school fees. There is therefore a need for state intervention to ensure equity. (Daviet, 2016:3)*

The adoption of this seemingly better version of ‘education for public good’ and its subsequent impact has muddied the waters in education debates and ensured that ‘quality education’ is for ‘the good’ of selected

sections of the 'public'. It constitutes the market demand symbolised by the 11% of well-resourced, properly staffed and functioning schools in the country. The private sector even funds such schools as their existence guarantees future generations of professionals (Zancajo, Verger & Fontdevila, 2022). It is this group that will be admitted into prestigious private post-school institutions (both locally and abroad), and eventually take up high-profile positions within the private and public sectors. Such trends and practices sit comfortably, and in fact untroubled, in a context where 'education' is seen as a 'public good'. This is regardless of the official version of the concept of 'public good' adopted: sanitised, or the original definition, the consequences are the same.

In writing about the problematics of this concept, Daviet (2016:3) argues that if 'the market cannot adequately estimate the demand, these goods are underprovided'. Indeed, for this is in line with the mathematical roots of the concept, and manifests in practice when government intervention becomes the only hope for the remaining 89% of dysfunctional schools in South Africa. It is here where 'the reality remains: the rich get education, and the poor get "schooling" ... the rich get access to universities and well-paying jobs while the poor get menial jobs, intermittent work or long-term unemployment' (Spaull, 2015:1). This neither addresses the circumstances in the country, nor serves the nation-building project to which we have committed ourselves.

At individual and local levels, this state of affairs produces asymmetrical relations of power. This results in the political environment in which teaching and learning takes place, teacher education occurs, and university teachers' professional identities negotiated. It is an environment that is intrinsically antagonistic, despite evoking supposedly liberatory concepts such as 'democracy'. This is the reason Morgan (2016: 708) argues that post independent, postcolonial, post

## CHAPTER 1

conflict societies' education systems often operate in spaces that are 'fundamentally hegemonic and antagonistic and are marked by intensified partisanship and often irreconcilable social struggles. This is an environment that contributes to the scapegoating of teachers and academics for complex societal problems far beyond the classroom'.

Often the presence of such hegemonic and antagonistic dimensions is fuelled and perpetuated, among other things, through 'an increasing involvement of non-state actors, including for-profit organizations' (Daviet, 2016:1), in the education system. This involvement is inevitable, particularly given the uncritical embracing of a mathematically conceived concept of 'education for public good'. Part of the reason for this, we argue, is the indiscriminate linking of education and the concept 'public good'. The consequences of such a linking include an unintentional:

*transposition of this concept to education, ... [which] has implications that run against the humanistic approach to education: not only does it fail to consider the social, cultural and ethical dimensions of education, but it also provides a rationale for privatization and commodification of education (Daviet 2016:4).*

It is in this context that the rich and privileged, owing to a historical unequal social structure largely rooted on race and, recently, increasingly on class (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001), can always afford high school fees and purchase better educational opportunities; therefore post-school returns, for their children. Within a society that espouses democratic principles, this is a 'ticking bomb' that could explode at any time as (mainly black) youths fall prey to opportunistic political and religious demagogues. The 2015/2016 often-militant #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall and other protests demanding the decolonisation of

the curriculum are concrete signs of the student body's loss of faith in and patience with democracy as an institution.

Thus, in our circumstances and given these signs, the government's intervention to improve educational opportunities and provide quality education for all cannot be seen to be the result of market failure, but rather a 'natural' response that is part of the broader social project of restorative justice. However, we argue that our democratic principles should help us see ourselves not as a 'market' but as a people of different races with an inequitable past and an unstable present but hoping for a future in which racial identity is not used to determine access to social resources, education and better life opportunities. Realising such a future requires educational policies, educators and institutions to appreciate the negative effects of colonial worldviews on knowledge, knowledge generation and teaching and learning. They need to value various ways of knowing, types of knowledges and ways of learning that are not necessarily mainstream.

We contend that the issues sketched above act as the instantiation of coloniality, which manifests as the assumption of western universalisms sublimated through a global economic order. As defined by Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009:132), decoloniality and decolonisation in praxis mean the 'decolonisation of knowledge and being by epistemically and affectively de-linking from the imperial/colonial organization of society'. The imperial/colonial organisation of society manifests as the economic privatisation of education, framed in this chapter as 'education for public good'. The analysis in this chapter now turns to consider the role of the continued link between postcolonial society and colonial modes of social organisation.

### 1.3 Coloniality: Impact on education

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Within the African continent, most educational policies appear to be laced with a yearning for the realisation of Euro-American and/or economically advanced societies' success stories, without critically analysing the differences between those contexts and ours. The dismal failure of outcomes-based education in South Africa is one example (Jansen & Christie, 1999). Through the globalisation discourse, the 'condition of coloniality' remains an invisible presence that still reinforces and achieves the colonial agenda set through the slave trade and imperialism. In clarifying the concept of coloniality, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:11) argues that:

*Coloniality must not be confused with colonialism. It survived the end of direct colonialism. In post colonies it continues to affect the lives of people, long after direct colonialism and administrative apartheid have been dethroned. What, therefore, needs to be understood is not just the 'not yet uhuru' postcolonial experience but the invisible vampirism of technologies of imperialism and colonial matrices of power that continue to exist in the minds, lives, languages, dreams, imaginations, and epistemologies of modern subjects in Africa and the entire global South.*

The 'epistemologies of modern subjects in Africa' were mainly learned, as Batibo (1995: 79) points out, by placing:

*...strong emphasis on traditional forms of education well before the arrival of Europeans. Adults in Khoisan- and Bantu-speaking societies, for example, had extensive responsibilities for transmitting cultural values and skills within kinship-based groups and sometimes within larger organizations, villages, or districts. Education involved oral histories of the group, tales of heroism*

*and treachery, and practice in the skills necessary for survival in a changing environment.*

Assuming no European imperialist tendencies, it would be reasonable to expect this status quo – the transmission of ‘oral histories of the group, tales of heroism and treachery’ – to still be in place today. Although formal education in the context of schooling and higher education cannot focus exclusively on these topics, we should not undermine or discard Indigenous knowledge, knowledge-generation practices, and teaching and learning that draw from African oral traditions and local contexts. As a matter of principle, both Black and White educators, academics and researchers need to evidence a conscious, deliberate, non-hypocritical, non-patronising and diligent interest in Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures, peoples and languages. A positive and embracing attitude holds the potential of leading to the generation of theories that are informed by life as it is lived, experienced and understood by 21<sup>st</sup>-century local inhabitants. It is in this context that universities will be able to introduce well-theorised scholarship emerging from, underpinned by and ‘speaking’ to, the African local experience.

If a decolonial education system is to be realised, it needs to happen across disciplines. Charles Eliot (1869:30), a former Harvard University president, described the characteristics of an American university as follows:

*A university must grow from seed. It cannot be transplanted from England or Germany in full leaf and bearing. When the American university appears, it will not be a copy of foreign institutions, but the slow and natural growth of American social and political habits.*

## CHAPTER 1

Similarly, our definition of a decolonial education system emphasises African identities and perspectives. However, this does not place knowledge produced within this framework beyond critique, nor does it imply avoiding the questioning of what constitutes knowledge and how it is developed. To ensure such critique, there must be a dialogue between African knowledge and that from Greek, Arab, and European traditions. In other words, African knowledge should not be viewed as the ultimate or exclusive source of understanding.

In the context of ‘education for public good’ which inherently excludes non-mainstream members of society, this principle is non-negotiable. Educators, researchers, and academic institutions should recognise and appreciate diverse forms of learning and knowledge, influenced by a post/decolonial approach to education. However, it remains crucial for marginalised groups to access the knowledge and skills valued by mainstream society as they continue their struggle for liberation.

### 1.4 The impact of coloniality on pedagogy

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Through pedagogical practices, or what Bernstein (1990) refers to as pedagogic discourse, we are referring to a selection of content, framing and pacing, as well as teaching and assessment practices. As we show in this section of the chapter, as ‘modern subjects in Africa’, to use Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2013:5) term, it is imperative to investigate the extent to which our pedagogic practices still favour the colonial agenda. For Bernstein (1996: 47), pedagogic discourse is ‘a principle by which other discourses are appropriated and brought into a special relationship with one another, for the purpose of their selective transmission and acquisition’. Underlying Bernstein’s (1975:85) pedagogical theory is his claim that institutions of learning act as the social classifier through what he terms the three ‘common message systems’ all educational institutions possess:

*Formal education knowledge can be considered to be realised through three message systems: curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation. Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as a valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as a valid realization of this knowledge.*

Bernstein (1996) argues that in modern societies the school curriculum perpetuates the class system, that it is socially constructed to maintain the hierarchical order of a class-based society, and that there is an alternative way of conceptualising knowledge. Bernstein defines curriculum as the knowledge deemed important. The knowledge that is taught (or content) is a selection, with some knowledge considered suitable and other knowledge excluded. Students from low-literate or low-income backgrounds often have limited access to written stories; something that compromises access to what is to be learned. This is crucial, as Bernstein (1990:75) puts it: 'the age by which a child should be able to read is a function of the sequencing rules of the pedagogic practice of the school'. Having written texts as the main carriers of knowledge, at the exclusion of oral ones, formal education 'acknowledge[s] the fact that these contents are transmitted primarily through reading, and that their acquisition is demonstrated primarily through writing' (Rose 2005:132). Consequently, educational practice at all levels emphasises delivering curriculum content rather than developing the literacy skills required to understand and acquire that content. This shift in focus is long overdue. Without it, pedagogic practice will not adequately address or align with the sociocultural background and educational needs of African learners (Lebakeng, Phalane & Nase, 2006:78). A focus on a mere transmission of curriculum contents, whether couched 'in terms of academic subjects, of personal or cultural growth, or of a critical stance; they all serve to mask the underlying skills required for acquiring these contents' (Rose, 2005:



## CHAPTER 1

136). Put differently, as long as formal education pedagogy does not take seriously the fact that it *lacks an emphasis on how to learn rather than just what to learn*, educational outcomes will stay the same. Thus, having considered the nuances which define education from the perspective of colonial impositions and colonial modes of being, the chapter next considers an alternative way of framing education as a means of unlocking its emancipatory potential.

### 1.5 Reading to Learn: A pedagogy for the common good

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According to Daviet (2016:8) ‘education for the common good’ is an alternative framework within which to make decisions and organise education in contemporary society:

*Common goods are those that contribute to the general interest, enabling society as a whole to be reinforced and to function better, as well as individuals to live better ... Defining what is a common good is a collective decision that involves the state, the market and civil society.*

If educationists, teacher educators, the government and the private sector were to adopt the ‘education as common good’ concept, we would all acknowledge that we are faced with a challenge to undo school classroom practices that evolved to reward the elite and marginalise the majority. We would then combine resources to implement practices that manifest a commitment to *learning-centredness* and not learner-centredness, learning to *how to learn* and not what to learn, and learning *how to know* to know and not what to know. Learner-centred education needs to answer: on what kind of learners does learning have to be centred? From which home and family backgrounds? Raised by which parent(s)? Under what social

circumstances? With what financial and educational resources? Bringing what kind of cultural capital into the classroom?

In some contexts, traditional approaches are still embraced: the teacher is the source of all learning and rote learning constitutes assessment practices. While progressive approaches have been sold since the 1880s as empowering learners (Radu, 2011), research reveals that both progressive and traditional approaches have failed equally to change educational outcomes (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Macken-Horarik, 2002; Martin, 1993, 1999; Martin & Painter, 1986; Martin & Rose, 2005; Rose, 2005; Rothery, 1989, 1996).

Part of the reason for this failure is that both approaches are premised on an incremental learning model, theoretically legitimated by Piaget (1928), based on the notion that learning occurs from the 'inside out' (i.e. biological development of the physical body). As a result, learners within the formal education system are continually evaluated to assess their readiness for advancement, rather than being diagnostically evaluated with a view to receive targeted tuition.

While traditional methods support dividing students into ability-based groups, progressive approaches advocate for personalised learning activities, viewing learning as an independent process by which each student is assumed to have innate skills and talents that align with the requirements of formal education. Therefore, under the assumptions of this model of educational practice, if students fail, the problem is with them and *not* with the system. Given that students come from varied economic and educational backgrounds, resulting in unequal development rates, both approaches contribute to the persistence of this ability gap.

All students enter formal schooling and university with this ability gap, and we argue that the root of this inequality stems from students'

## CHAPTER 1

varying abilities to learn independently through reading. Consequently, the distinction between those who are admitted to university and those who gain entry through alternative methods such as admissions or placement tests depends largely on their capacity to engage with reading independently. For Sternberg (2007:8), the 'essence of the problem in using merit-based approaches has been that certain groups consistently perform more poorly in traditional admission tests than do other groups'.

The difference in capability is the results of the primary socialisation in the home in terms of the degree to which each child experiences parent-child literacy from an early age. Research shows that 'children in literate middle-class families experience an average of 1,000 hours [of parent-child reading] before starting school, whereas those from oral cultural backgrounds may experience little or none' (Bergin, in Rose 2005:133). To emphasise, 'literacy development does not begin when a child first enters school and conventional literacy instruction is initiated. Instead ... [it] begins from birth and seems to represent a continuum of development' (Wood & Hood, 2004:103).

Most young adults enrolled in post-school educational institutions in South Africa come from cultural backgrounds that prioritize speaking over reading and are economically disadvantaged. Many of these students hail from ex-Department of Basic Education schools located in rural areas or Black townships, where a reading culture is largely absent in most families. According to Thomson's study (2008), most of these students lack essential reading skills before entering higher education. Furthermore, the insufficient emphasis on teaching reading across the curriculum in formal education means that, throughout primary and secondary education, these students are not granted the opportunity of developing the skills needed to learn independently through literacy skills crucial for accessing knowledge in higher education. This

disadvantage is further exacerbated by the fact that English, the primary language of instruction in most South African educational institutions, is seldom spoken in rural and Black township communities. Language thus still functions as a system which substantiates and reinscribes the colonial matrix of power in the education sector in South Africa and many former British colonies.

Faced with similar challenges among the Aboriginal community in Australia, Rose (2011) reports on how the development of a pedagogy for 'the common good' emerged. In his 'Beating Educational Inequality with an Integrated Reading Pedagogy', Rose (2011) describes how, in the late 1980s, he and his colleagues developed a pedagogy based on their experiences with the Pitjantjatjara Indigenous community in Australia. This community faced significant self-destructive challenges, largely because their inadequate education failed to elevate them from their marginalized status as 'disadvantaged'. Rose (2011) describes how almost every school-age child in this community was involved in substance abuse and led lives marked by despair. He found that, despite their teachers being trained similarly to those in other Australian state-funded schools, the learners could not read at age-appropriate levels. '[w]hatever other problems were hampering the education of these children, their inability to read the school curriculum was clearly an overwhelming stumbling block' (Rose 2011:104). He asserted that this was a worldwide phenomenon for all communities in distress.

As a social justice project, Rose (2005) took on the challenge of attempting to reverse the social inequalities faced by this community by implementing interventions in the classroom setting. Using a series of studies (Alexander, 2000; Folds, 1987; Gibbons, 2002; Malcolm, 1991; Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Rose, 2004), he devised a methodology that incorporated a question-response feedback pattern and supported it with the Scaffolding Reading and Writing for Indigenous Children in

## CHAPTER 1

School program, created in collaboration with colleagues working on similar initiatives for disadvantaged communities (Christie & Martin, 1997; Rose, 2008). He observed that the lack of early parent-child reading had a direct impact on learners' performance, and that primary school students were not adequately prepared to learn from reading as anticipated:

*The key difference with the Pitjantjatjara children was not just that a non-English language was spoken in the home, since a high proportion of other Australian children also come from non-English speaking families, but that there was no parent child reading in the home. (Rose, 2011:103)*

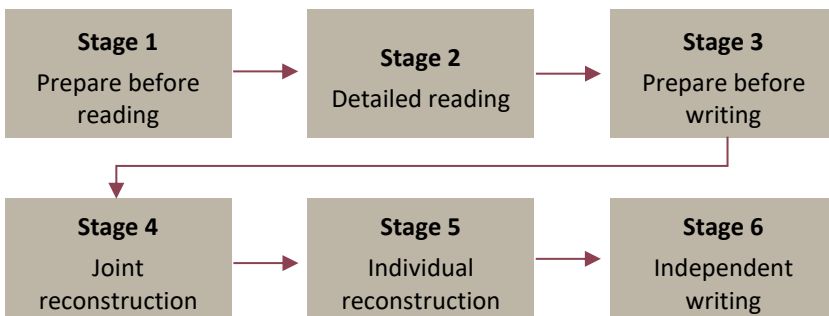
His pedagogic approach, Reading to Learn, was then structured and used to overcome these shortcomings. It was 'developed in response to current urgent needs, particularly of Indigenous and other marginalized learners, to rapidly improve reading and writing for educational access and success' (Rose, 2005:131). Reading to Learn emphasizes teaching reading and writing to democratize the classroom, aiming to facilitate learning and ensure meaningful participation for children from less advantaged backgrounds, who often face a gap between home and school literacy practices. To develop this methodology, Rose (2005) drew from Vygotsky, Halliday and Bernstein's theories of social learning, systemic functional linguistics and pedagogic discourse, respectively.

Vygotsky's (1981) idea of learning as a social process, Halliday's (1993) conception of language as embedded in social context, and Bernstein's (1999) notion of pedagogic discourse are combined in the Reading to Learn pedagogy to scaffold learners whose literacies do not necessarily parallel those required by the schooling system (Gee, 1991). While learners' literacies outside of the school environment are generally context-dependent and verbal, and thrive in familiar face-to-face contexts, school literacies are context-independent, generally written

and do not depend at all on physical proximity between the addresser and the addressee (Bernstein, 2000).

To realise the goals of the Reading to Learn pedagogy, a *Scaffolding Interaction Cycle* is implemented. This cycle suggests that, in engaging with written texts, teachers need to ensure that learners are provided with the prompts or cues needed to understand sequences of meanings at the level of the whole text, paragraph, sentence, word and sound/letter patterns. It insists that the pattern needs to be repeated through each activity in the sequence that makes up the scaffolding approach. When implemented in the classroom, the *Scaffolding Interaction Cycle* underpins a series of activities in two carefully structured pedagogic routines or ‘lesson sequences’: one for narrative texts and one for factual texts (Rose, 1999).

In applying the *Scaffolding Interaction Cycle*, each activity during the lesson sequence draws on the discourse pattern of the text to provide the degree of support learners require to understand and recognise patterns of meaning in the text at a number of levels: the genre of the text and the way meaning unfolds, the sentences and wording of the text, and the sound/letter or spelling patterns in the text. Figure 1.1 illustrates the six stages of this cycle.



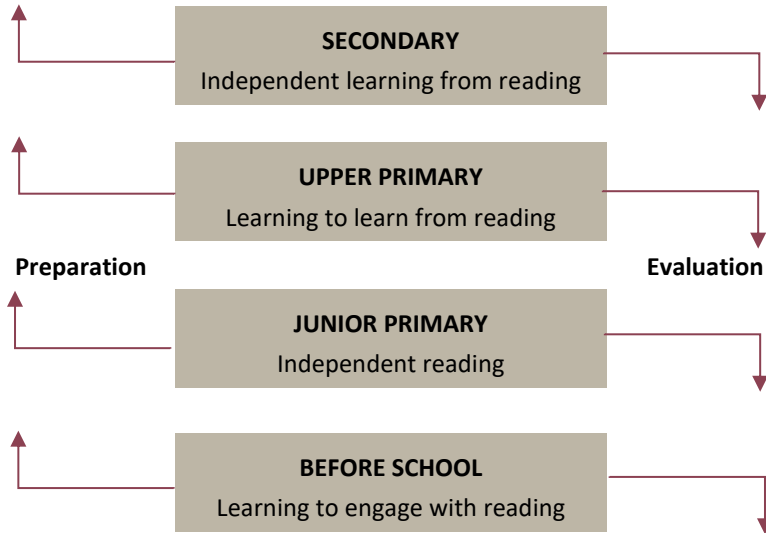
**Figure 1.1: The Scaffolding Interaction Cycle. The Scaffolding Interaction Cycle**

## CHAPTER 1

In the 'Prepare before reading' stage, the teacher reads the text aloud and summarises it. The learners listen and get the idea of the passage. They then read the passage, sentence by sentence, in the 'Detailed reading' stage. In this stage, the teacher gives meanings of words in each sentence. The learners read after the teacher and develop confidence in reading the passage. During 'Prepare before writing', the learners manipulate sentences on cardboard strips to practise spelling (primary school) or make notes from the passage to practise spelling (secondary school). This sets the stage for 'Joint reconstruction', when learners use the same words in the passage read to create a new story, new events, new characters and a new setting. In factual texts, the passage read is rewritten using the notes that the learners wrote in 'Prepare before writing'. However, the language used is the learners', not that of the text. This is a whole-class or group activity. In 'Individual reconstruction', a crucial stage, learners draft a new story, as individuals, using the same words as in 'Joint reconstruction' to create their story. In factual texts, the new passage is rewritten using the notes, but this time the learner writes alone. In the final stage, 'Independent writing', the learners are given a new, different task emerging from the same text used in previous stages. They write as individuals and the task is assessed.

Recent studies on the role of Reading to Learn pedagogy within the South African context reveal its major contribution in turning education from a 'public good' into a 'common good' (Mataka, 2017, 2019; Mawela, 2018; Mgqwashu & Makhathini, 2017). Mataka's (2017, 2019) three-year interventionist action research case study traced 32 learners' literacy development from grades 10 to 12. Of these learners, 13 received a bachelor's pass and entered universities in South Africa. They entered their second year of university study in 2019. Makhathini (2015), Mgqwashu and Makhathini (2017) and Mawela's (2018) studies, on the other hand, examined the role of Reading to Learn in teacher professional development and teacher education programmes, and the

changes it brought to their classroom practice. Figure 1.2 shows the reading development curriculum underlying the overt content-focused curriculum sequence of schooling:



*Source: Adapted from Rose (2005)*

### **Figure 1.2: Stages in literacy development sequence**

As skills in learning from reading are rarely taught explicitly in upper primary, secondary and higher education institutions, successful learners acquire them tacitly over years of practice in reading and writing the overt curriculum content in class and as homework. The accelerating volume of this content at the secondary level forces successful students to develop the skills they will need in tertiary study to independently read academic texts and reproduce and interpret what they have read in assignments.

Therefore, as Figure 1.2 attempts to show, each stage of the reading development curriculum, from parent–child reading onwards, prepares



## CHAPTER 1

learners with the skills they will need for the next stage (represented by upward arrows in Figure 1.2). However, as these skills are not explicitly taught in the following stage, learners are evaluated on skills they acquired in the preceding stage (downward arrows in Figure 1.2). Since most assessment tasks in formal education, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels, are intended to measure whether students have learned from reading (Rose, 2005), neglecting explicit instruction in reading throughout the curriculum, from primary to higher education, leads to the continuation of inequalities in our classrooms. For most of the students I teach, such inequalities are a consequence of the lack of pre-schooling experiences necessary to prepare children for formal learning.

In many respects, then, the Reading to Learn pedagogy shifts our model of education by actualising Jansen's (2009) 'teaching to disrupt' proposition. It achieves this by:

- tapping into the agential capacity of the student/learner, which;
- actualises Freire's (1970) notion of problem-posing education, which we can frame as decoloniality in praxis; all of which
- allows students' epistemic access to educational concepts and ideas.

The Reading to Learn pedagogy is rooted in a conception of 'education as a common good', which allows us to actualise the emancipatory potential of education.

### 1.6 Conclusion

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The underlying argument in this chapter is that, at this point in our history, perhaps a viable option to fast-track change is to enable everyone to reach 'common standards', as well as equality of opportunity and epistemic access. To do this, we need to recognise and

deliberately undo the inherently colonial dimension of most ideas of ‘common’ pedagogical practices that are supposedly suitable to all. Educators and educational institutions need to begin to value many types of learning regimes and knowledge traditions. Such a move could be inspired by a post/decolonial orientation to education. However, it is still important for marginalised populations to have access to the knowledges and skills that are valued by mainstream society, so that they can navigate and survive their current world as they simultaneously fight for equal recognition, a decolonial education system and liberation. The Reading to Learn pedagogy is offered as a tool to enable this. Furthermore, it is presented as a mode by which we can begin to truly realise the emancipatory potential of education in a system which is oriented towards a decolonial paradigm.

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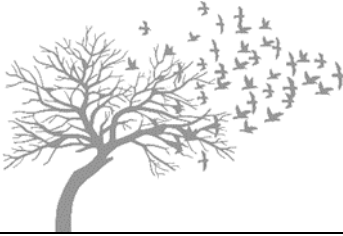
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## CHAPTER 2

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# Multilingualism: an effective learning and teaching strategy to enhance higher education curriculum practice

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### Abstract

In response to a context laced with coloniality, this chapter presents a systematic review of higher education pre-service teachers' curricular and the role of multilingualism. The review is designed to carry out a critical exploration of the contribution multilingualism could make in shaping and enhancing learning and teaching strategies for pre-service teachers. The chapter uses the Population, Interest, Context (PICO) framework to generate data. Findings enable the chapter to unpack the benefits in the integration of multilingualism in higher education curricula. Following the PRISMA guidelines for article selection, the chapter elucidates specific strategies that are effective in higher education multilingual educational settings.

**Keywords:** multilingualism, pre-service teachers, Population Interest Context framework, adaptive curriculum design, linguistic diversity



### 2.1 Introduction

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Following the previous chapter that focussed mainly on a pedagogical shift from teaching *the what of knowledge* to *the how of learning*, this chapter explores data that emerged from a systematic review of literature on higher education pre-service teachers' curricular and the role of multilingualism. The chapter presents the ability to communicate in multiple languages as not only being a valuable skill for pre-service teachers, but also a significant factor in fostering inclusive learning and teaching. Cummins (2021) defines Multilingualism as the ability to use more than one language to communicate effectively with different communities. In the context of the study reported in this chapter, Multilingualism is understood as the ability to integrate multiple languages into teaching, support linguistic backgrounds and improve the learning outcome of all learners.

Higher education is already undergoing a significant transformation that is driven by the increasing linguistic diversity of its staff and student populations (Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023). For this reason, Morea and Fisher (2023) assert that the impact of globalisation on educational systems worldwide necessitates a shift toward viewing multilingual realities of pre-service teachers as not something to accommodate, but instead as the reality that has always been in our classrooms but ignored. It is such observations that necessitated a study into the effects of multilingualism on learning and teaching strategies within university settings. Within a transforming and decolonising higher education context, the integration of multiple languages is no longer a mere trend to be accommodated, but a strategic shift toward democratising learning by creating more inclusive and diverse learning environments. As noted by Bessie (2023) and Miranda and Wahyudin (2023), this shift is redefining curriculum design and development, pedagogical practices

and assessment techniques to reflect the varied linguistic (and by implication cultural) backgrounds of all students.

This growing recognition of multilingualism's value in democratising learning and enhancing educational outcomes has led to a re-evaluation of teaching approaches by teacher educators (Niyibizi *et al.*, 2021). Studies by Makhalemele *et al.* (2018) and Bhatt *et al.* (2022) suggest that engaging with curriculum as praxis in the process of identifying content in multiple languages not only makes possible the deepening of pre-service teachers' understandings of the subject matter, but also fosters reflexivity, critical thinking, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging. This engagement with curriculum ensures enhanced engagement and pedagogical innovation and encourages educators to explore new teaching methods and technologies to meet the needs of a linguistically diverse student body. The positive correlation between multilingual education environments and academic success highlights the transformative potential of integrating multilingualism into the curriculum (Omodan, 2019).

## 2.2 Aim and Problem Statement

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In the current landscape of higher education, institutions are confronted with the challenge to cater to a linguistically diverse student population. This diversity, a direct consequence of globalisation, brings to the fore the limitations of traditional monolingual teaching approaches that have dominated university settings for centuries (Makhalemele *et al.*, 2018). The long-standing existing educational paradigms on languages of learning and teaching often fall short of addressing the needs of pre-service teachers who come from varied linguistic backgrounds, thereby impacting their academic engagement, comprehension, and overall learning experiences (Bhatt, Badwan & Madiba, 2022). While there is a growing acknowledgement of the importance of linguistic inclusivity,

## CHAPTER 2

the integration of multilingualism within the curriculum remains sporadic and inadequately supported by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Consequently, a significant portion of the student body is left navigating an educational environment that does not fully recognise and/or leverage their linguistic capabilities, leading to potential barriers in their academic and professional progress (Morea & Fisher, 2023).

Ideally, HEIs should serve as vibrant, inclusive communities where linguistic diversity is not just accommodated, but recognised, celebrated and tangibly bolstered as a cornerstone of learning and teaching, and not just an afterthought. This is an important point for, as things currently stand, multilingualism does not appear to be seamlessly integrated into curriculum practices, reflecting the linguistic realities of the global community. When curriculum is viewed as praxis, the diverse languages 'naturally' get integrated not only to enhance the learning experience for pre-service teachers, but also to promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of, and respect for, cultural diversity among all students. Furthermore, by embedding multilingualism into the curriculum, institutions can foster innovative teaching strategies that are reflective of, and responsive to, the diverse needs of their student populations. The move towards such a multilingual framework is essential for preparing pre-service teachers to thrive in a fast-globalising world, equipped with the skills to navigate and contribute meaningfully to an increasingly fast diversifying educational context.

However, the transition to a more linguistically inclusive educational model is fraught with challenges. This manifests in the way the development of multilingual curriculum content is resisted. The preparation of educators to teach effectively in multilingual environments receives limited to no attention, and the establishment of a supportive institutional culture that values linguistic diversity often receives lip-service in most higher education contexts. The urgency with

which these omissions need to be attended to cannot be over-emphasised. This continued lack of recognition of the profound benefits multilingualism brings to the educational sphere continues to contribute to either a high attrition rate or the conferring of degrees to graduates that are underprepared for an already multilingual world of work. Benefits that get lost range from improved cognitive abilities and academic performance, to enhanced empathy and global awareness.

This failure to integrate multilingualism into higher education curricula not only undermines the potential of a significant portion of the student body, but also diminishes the capacity of educational institutions to foster truly global professionals and citizens. As such, solving this problem is crucial for breaking down linguistic barriers in education, promoting equity and inclusivity, and harnessing the full range of talents and perspectives that linguistically diverse pre-service teachers bring to the academic community.

### **2.2.1. The Population, Interest, Context (PICO) Framework**

To explore the impact of multilingualism on learning and teaching strategies in higher education comprehensively, this review employs the Population, Interest, Context (PICO) framework. Cooke, Smith and Booth (2012) explain that the PICO framework is a tool used in qualitative research to structure and refine research questions and literature search strategies by focusing on three key elements:

- population (the group of people being studied);
- interest (the phenomenon or intervention being explored); and
- context (the setting or environment in which the study takes place).

Furthermore, Booth (2016) notes that this framework emerged from the evidence-based medicine movement in the early 1990s and was

## CHAPTER 2

advocated by Dr David Sackett. Booth (2016) further asserts that it has been more commonly used in qualitative research settings, including fields such as education and social sciences, to assist in refining search strategies for literature reviews and in framing research questions. In the process, it considers the diverse population of higher education pre-service teachers and teacher educators, the interest in multilingual educational strategies, and the context of higher education institutions. The study reported in this chapter aimed to explore how multilingualism shapes educational practices and outcomes, providing valuable insights for educators and policymakers alike.

### **PICo Framework (Booth, 2016)**

Population (P): Pre-service teachers in higher education.

Interest (I): Effects of the integration of multilingualism within the curriculum practice in higher education.

Context (Co): Institutions of higher learning.

### **Research Question**

How does the integration of multilingualism in higher education curriculum influence the development and effectiveness of learning and teaching strategies?

### **2.2.2. Current understandings on Multilingualism**

Current research findings indicate an understanding that the shift toward multilingual education compels teacher educators to rethink and modify their teaching approaches to cater to the diverse backgrounds of pre-service teachers (Makhalemele, Mayimele & Ngoaketsi, 2018; Bhatt, Badwan & Madiba, 2022; Peercy, Tigert & Fredricks, 2023). Some scholars, furthermore, have attempted to demonstrate the extent to which multilingualism in higher education can enhance educational

outcomes significantly (Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2023; Ngcobo & Makumane, 2023; Tshuma & Theledi, 2023). In this regard, Makhalemele *et al.* (2018) have been instrumental in developing the understanding that pre-service teachers who engage with curriculum content in multiple languages often develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter and exhibit improved critical thinking skills. Furthermore, their work also shows that multilingual education environments foster a stronger sense of belonging and inclusion among pre-service teachers from various linguistic backgrounds, contributing to their overall academic success and well-being.

In terms of teacher education more specifically, studies reveal that multilingualism also plays a crucial role in pre-service teacher engagement and pedagogical innovations. Among other things, other studies reveal that teacher educators who utilise multilingual strategies in their teaching, often find that pre-service teachers are more engaged and motivated (Paetsch *et al.*, 2023). This engagement stems from pre-service teachers' ability to connect with the material in a language in which they are comfortable, leading to a more meaningful and personalised learning experience. Moreover, Barros *et al.* (2021) explain why there is a need to cater to a multilingual pre-service teacher population in teacher education. They thus further argue that it inspires and drives educators to innovate and to experiment with new teaching methods and educational technologies.

While the benefits of multilingualism in higher education are clear, implementing effective multilingual strategies comes with its set of challenges. Mgqwashu (2013) states that these challenges include:

- developing curriculum content that is accessible in multiple languages;
- training educators to teach in a multilingual environment; and,

## CHAPTER 2

- ensuring that linguistic diversity is supported and valued within the institution.

Overcoming these challenges is crucial for the successful integration of multilingualism in curriculum practice in higher education. Van Wyk and Tshelane (2016) describe curriculum practice in higher education as a process that involves the planning, execution and evaluation of educational programs and courses. These practices determine what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed, reflecting the academic standards and goals of an institution.

### 2.3 Conceptual lens

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Multilingualism as a conceptual framework guided the discussions and analysis in this chapter. It encapsulates ideas beyond the ability to speak multiple languages, but extends to a broader understanding of cultural diversity, communication patterns, and educational inclusivity (Makalela, 2016). Thus, for multilingualism, being proficient in multiple languages enhances cognitive flexibility, broadens cultural understanding, and improves communication skills (Backus *et al.*, 2013).

Cummin (2021) opines that the relevance of multilingualism in higher education can be traced back to two key factors. Firstly, the rise of global mobility has led to more linguistically diverse pre-service teacher populations. This diversity presents challenges as well as opportunities for educational institutions to rethink their teaching and curriculum development strategies and choices. Secondly, a growing recognition exists that multilingual competencies are valuable assets in the global job market, pushing universities to integrate language diversity into their curriculum as praxis.

### **2.3.1. Multilingualism and Relevance**

To achieve the purposes of this chapter, both multilingualism and relevance were used to analyse the findings in this study. Both concepts made it possible for the study to reveal the multifaceted benefits of multilingualism in higher education. Andleeb, Asgher & Zimi (2023) have highlighted how multilingualism is linked to cognitive benefits. These include enhanced problem-solving skills and greater mental flexibility. Both skills are presented as crucial in higher education settings, a context characterised by complexity, with critical thinking as being paramount to academic success. It is for this reason that multilingual pre-service teachers may have a distinct advantage in these areas. Amongst other things, it influences how pre-service teachers engage with, and benefit from, educational content.

Building on the cognitive advantages, multilingualism also fosters cultural awareness and sensitivity. In environments where pre-service teachers come from a myriad of backgrounds, cultural competence becomes essential, as noted by Thamaga-Chitja and Mbatha (2012). This competence facilitates better communication and understanding among pre-service teachers and academic staff, cultivating a more inclusive and harmonious learning environment.

The necessity for innovation in teaching strategies as part of an understanding of curriculum as praxis emerges as another significant aspect. Thus, recognising the varied linguistic backgrounds of pre-service teachers compels the development of more inclusive curricular with a focus on ensuring that teaching strategies are effective and fit-for-purpose, as argued by Subban and Mahlo (2017). Curricular design tends to include the deployment of bilingual and/or multilingual instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and integrating technology to support language learning, ensuring that all students can fully engage with the curriculum.



## CHAPTER 2

Moreover, the improvement of communication skills stands out as a critical benefit of multilingualism. According to Rubtsova (2020) multilingualism enhances the ability of pre-service teachers and educators to express ideas more clearly and understand others' cultural perspectives deeply. This enhanced communication is indispensable in fostering collaborative learning, facilitating research projects, and engaging in academic discourse. Through these linked benefits, multilingualism enriches the educational experience significantly, preparing students for a more interconnected and diverse world.

### 2.4 Methodology and Design

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To generate data, this chapter adopted a qualitative research methodology. This choice was motivated by its ability to explore complex phenomena within their contexts and allows for an in-depth exploration of how multilingualism impacts learning and teaching strategies in higher education. This approach was conducive to understanding the experiences of pre-service teachers and teacher educators in a multilingual academic environment.

The qualitative methodology in this study involved a comprehensive review and analysis of existing literature and qualitative data sources. This included academic articles, case studies, and institutional reports that provided insights into the integration and effects of multilingualism in higher education. The focus was on gathering rich, descriptive data that highlighted the experiences, perceptions and practices related to multilingualism in learning and teaching contexts.

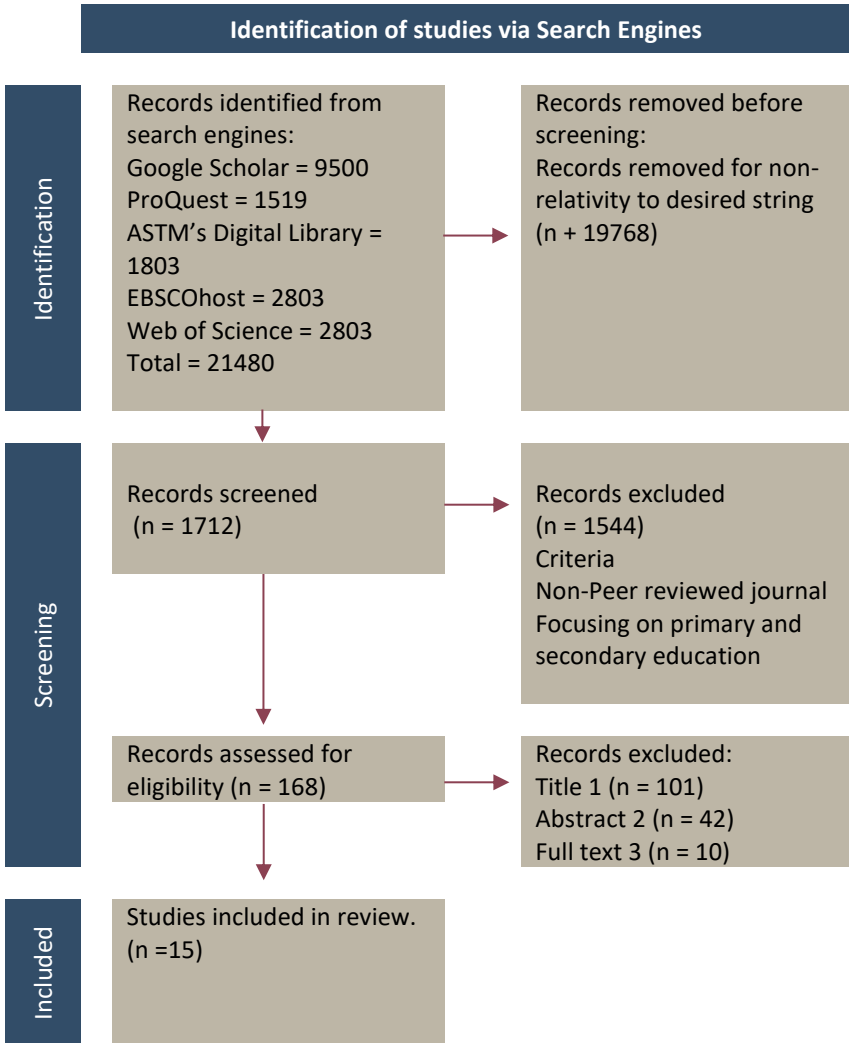
#### **2.4.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

The review focused on peer-reviewed academic articles, case studies, and institutional reports that specifically addressed multilingualism in higher education, particularly those concerning pre-service teachers,

teacher educators, curriculum practice, and language of learning and teaching in higher education. Preference was given to publications in English or those with English translations, ideally published within the last decade (2013 –2023). This approach ensured the relevance and currency of the data. Studies from diverse global contexts were included to provide a comprehensive understanding. Conversely, the review excluded non-peer-reviewed sources, such as blogs or opinion pieces, and studies irrelevant to multilingualism in higher education, such as those focusing exclusively on primary or secondary education. To maintain a focus on current, practical insights, studies reporting on research older than 10 years and non-empirical theoretical papers were also excluded.

#### **2.4.2. Search strategy and terms**

The search was conducted across multiple databases, including ERIC, Google Scholar, ProQuest, ASTM’s Digital Library, EBSCOhost, and Web of Science. Key search terms included combinations of 'multilingualism', 'bilingual education', 'higher education', 'pre-service teachers', 'teaching strategies', 'language diversity', 'curriculum development', and 'linguistic inclusion'. These terms were used in various strings such as "Multilingualism AND higher education" to maximise the breadth and relevance of the search results. The review also involved hand-searching the references of selected articles and consulting experts in the field for key studies and/or reports, as portrayed in Figure 2.1 below:



**Figure 2.1: PRISMA flow diagram (Parums, 2021):**

### 2.4.3. Ethical considerations in literature review

While conducting a comprehensive literature review, as presented in this chapter, it is important to acknowledge that such an endeavour, though devoid of primary empirical data collection and direct human

subject participation, still operates within an ethical framework (Davies, 2020). Proferes *et al.* (2021) recount that the lack of requirements for obtaining formal ethical approval due to the nature of the review does not diminish the necessity of adhering to ethical standards. Given the nature of a literature review, there was no necessity for an application for ethical clearance (Suri, 2020).

Despite formal ethical application processes, this chapter presents significant findings. The insights garnered from the extensive review of literature not only contribute to the academic discourse on the subject under discussion, but also offer valuable perspectives for practitioners and policymakers in the field. The synthesis of existing literature conducted with a commitment to ethical research practices highlights the importance of multilingualism in higher education and its impact on learning and teaching strategies. This comprehensive review serves as testament to the fact that scholarly work, even in the absence of primary data or external funding, can yield important contributions to our understanding of complex educational phenomena.

#### **2.4.4. Data analysis**

In analysing the qualitative data generated from the comprehensive review of literature on multilingualism in higher education, a thematic analysis approach was employed. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Booth, 2016). The choice of thematic analysis as the analytical strategy for this study was driven by its suitability for exploring the nuanced impacts of multilingualism on higher education's teaching and learning strategies. This method allowed for an in-depth examination of qualitative data, facilitating the identification and interpretation of key themes related to multilingualism's role in educational contexts. It provided a structured approach to organise and describe the data, while also offering the flexibility to capture the complex experiences of pre-

## CHAPTER 2

service teachers and their educators. Through thematic analysis, the study highlighted the multifaceted benefits and challenges of multilingualism effectively, offering valuable insights into its implications for pedagogical innovation and inclusivity in higher education.

### 2.5 Results and discussion

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In this section, we explore a comprehensive examination of 15 selected articles by applying Thematic Analysis as our principal tool of inquiry. This analytical approach was uniquely tailored to view these articles through the lens of multiculturalism theory, a perspective crucial for understanding the intricate dynamics of multilingualism in higher education. The relevance of each article to the overarching themes of this chapter was meticulously investigated using themes, enabling us to reveal the deeper implications and insights they offer. This process not only highlighted the varied dimensions of multilingual education, but also illuminated how multiculturalism shapes and is shaped by the discourses within academic literature. It is against these observations that the ensuing analysis presents a detailed exploration of these articles, unfolding their significance in contributing to our understanding of multilingual practices in diverse educational settings, as reflected in Table 2.1 below:

**Table 2.1: Summary of articles:**

Author/s	Article/s summary
Lasagabaster, Cots and Mancho-Barés (2013)	The article discusses how multilingualism in higher education increases linguistic diversity and the interplay between minority and mainstream languages.
Mgqwashu (2013)	The study addresses questions of linguistic and cultural relevance in knowledge production and considers the implications of using isiZulu in postgraduate education, particularly for postgraduate pre-service teachers.

Yildiz and Scharaldi (2014)	This article discusses using mobile technologies to develop a multicultural and multilingual curriculum, integrating various subjects for inclusive instruction
Preece (2015)	This research explores how multilingualism in higher education impacts students' academic language knowledge and experience, affecting their relationship with academic language.
Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015)	This research finds that multilingualism in South African higher education is positively related to cognitive development and plays a crucial role in academic success.
Catalano and Hamann (2016)	This article asserts that multilingual education can be successful if language teaching is restructured towards multilingual norms
Mphasha (2016)	The article also highlights the deep connection between language and culture, suggesting that neglecting African languages in education could erode the social identity of their speakers as South Africans.
Guarda and Helm (2017)	The study explores how language shift in higher education leads to new teaching approaches and increased awareness of student needs, potentially leading to pedagogical innovation
Palfreyman and Van der Walt (2017)	The study highlights strategies and practices of successful bilingual students in South African higher education, exploiting their bilingual proficiency in multilingual contexts.
Mayaba, Ralarala and Angu (2018)	It suggests that the current language policies in higher education perpetuate power imbalances and inequalities, limiting students' access to knowledge and their ability to engage deeply with academic content. This linguistic reality poses a challenge to students' academic performance and their ability to make meaningful connections with the learned material.
Pawlak and Kiermasz (2018)	The research investigates how multilingualism impacts language learning strategies, noting higher strategy use in a second language compared to a third language, mainly influenced by proficiency levels and motivation

## CHAPTER 2

Romero and Shivers-Mcnair (2018)	This paper discusses how multilingual students can develop critical frameworks to challenge and change normative constructions within their disciplines by using teaching and learning strategies that resist erasure
Dimova and Kling (2020)	This article discusses opportunities in higher education to offer instruction in multiple languages, influencing language policies and practices. It highlights the need for integrating content and language in multilingual universities.
Tondi and Fredericks (2020)	This article offers a critical perspective on the role of language in shaping knowledge systems, particularly in the context of higher education in Africa.
Mgqwashu (2023)	The paper emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing the diverse learning needs and backgrounds of students, especially in a post-merger and decolonizing educational context.

### 2.5.1. Thematic analysis of the summary of articles

#### Pedagogical Innovation through linguistic diversity

Guarda and Helm's (2017) research highlights the transformative role of multilingualism in higher education. Their study reveals how integrating diverse languages in teaching not only caters to varied student demographics but also drives educators to innovate pedagogically. This aligns with multilingualism, suggesting that linguistic diversity acts as a catalyst for educational innovation. The study directly responds to the research question by showcasing the influence of multilingualism on the development of more inclusive and effective teaching strategies, reflecting the 'Interest' aspect of the PICO framework.

#### Cognitive advantages of multilingualism

Pawlak and Kiermasz's (2018) study highlights the cognitive benefits of multilingualism in language learning strategies, particularly noting the differences in strategy use across second and third languages. The

research supports the theory that multilingualism enhances mental flexibility and problem-solving skills. By illustrating the impact of multilingualism on language learning strategies in higher education, particularly among foreign language majors, Pawlak and Kiermasz's work contributes to addressing the 'Population' component of the PICO framework.

### **Challenges and opportunities of linguistic diversity**

Lasagabaster, Cots and Mancho-Barés (2013) explore the challenges and tensions arising from linguistic diversity in higher education. Their study reflects on the complex interaction between minority and mainstream languages, resonating with the theory that linguistic diversity presents opportunities as well as challenges. This study responds to the research question by examining the implementation difficulties of multilingual strategies, addressing the 'Context' aspect of the PICO framework.

### **Technology in Multilingual Education**

Yildiz and Scharaldi's (2014) research focuses on the integration of mobile technologies in multicultural and multilingual education, demonstrating how technology can support multilingual learning and teaching. This approach is in line with the multilingualism theory, which emphasises innovative tools in language acquisition. Yildiz and Scharaldi's work adds to the research question by showcasing effective strategies for incorporating multilingualism in higher education, particularly in terms of 'Population' and 'Interest'.

### **Empowering Multilingual students**

Romero and Shivers-McNair (2018) investigate how multilingual students use their language skills to transform academic practices. Their findings illustrate the empowering effect of language proficiency, as predicted by multilingualism, in enabling students to critically engage with their learning environments. This study addresses the 'Interest'



## CHAPTER 2

component of the PICO framework, highlighting the development of critical and resistant learning and teaching strategies facilitated by multilingualism.

### **Advocacy for Inclusive language policies**

Mayaba, Ralarala and Angu (2018) argue for a re-evaluation of the role of language in education, advocating for a curriculum that is more inclusive of African languages. This inclusion is seen as a critical step towards social justice and a decolonised educational system. It proposes that student voices should be at the forefront of driving changes in language policies, emphasising the need for a curriculum practice that recognises and values students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The discussion highlights the necessity of multilingualism in higher education, not only for cultural identity but also as a means for academic engagement and critical thinking, aligning with the principles of critical pedagogy. The article calls for a shift in perspective, recognising the importance of multilingualism as a core skill for students, essential for fostering a more equitable and inclusive educational environment.

### **Addressing language challenges in higher education**

The paper by Mgqwashu (2013) discusses the challenges isiZulu-speaking pre-service teachers face in an English-dominant higher education system. It emphasises the need for developing isiZulu's academic discourse for effective integration into higher education. The paper further asserts that this is crucial for enabling isiZulu-speaking pre-service teachers to engage comprehensively with their studies. The article aligns with the theme of enhancing learning and teaching strategies through multilingualism in higher education, providing insights into the challenges and opportunities of incorporating Indigenous languages such as isiZulu in academic settings. This supports the exploration of multilingualism to improve educational outcomes and promote cultural inclusivity.

## **2.5.2. Theoretical Implications**

### **Multilingualism as a catalyst for pedagogical innovation**

Guarda and Helm (2017) and Dimova and Kling (2020) underscore the dynamic nature of multilingualism in reshaping educational approaches. They indicate that multilingualism not only diversifies the linguistic landscape of higher education but also serves as a key driver for pedagogical change, encouraging educators to rethink their instructional methodologies and adopt more flexible, responsive approaches to teaching.

Yildiz and Scharaldi (2014) and Ngubane and Ntombela (2020) argue that the exploration of technology in multilingual settings extends the conversation by illustrating how digital tools can bridge linguistic gaps and foster inclusive learning environments. This reveals a synergistic relationship between multilingualism and technological innovation, suggesting that the effective integration of technology in education can amplify the benefits of multilingual approaches.

### **Cognitive and cultural Implications of Multilingualism**

Pawlak and Kiermasz (2018) discern the cognitive advantages associated with multilingualism, such as improved memory, better multitasking abilities, and enhanced creative thinking. They highlight that multilingual education not only improves language proficiency but also contributes to overall cognitive development, underscoring the broad educational impacts of multilingual approaches.

Cultural analysis from Mayaba, Ralarala and Angu (2018) and Mgwashu (2014) emphasise the role of multilingualism in cultivating cultural awareness and empathy among students. They suggest that multilingual education not only imparts linguistic skills but also fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, preparing students for a globalised world.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Challenges and tensions in Multilingual settings**

Lasagabaster, Cots and Mancho-Barés (2013) bring to light the practical challenges of implementing multilingualism in higher education, such as resource allocation, language policy conflicts, and balancing the needs of diverse linguistic groups. They highlight the complexities involved in managing linguistic diversity within academic institutions. Insights from Preece (2015) provide an in-depth look at the struggles students encounter in multilingual academic settings, especially those from linguistically diverse backgrounds. These insights point to the need for more supportive structures and resources to help students navigate the challenges of multilingualism, emphasising the gap between idealised policy and real-world implementation.

### **Multilingualism and learning-centred curriculum practice**

Glukhova and Sorokina (2018); Kasmer and Billings (2017) and Mgwqwashu (2023), collectively illustrate how multilingualism can be leveraged to create more learning-centred curriculum practice experiences. They further argue that when students are allowed to engage with content in their preferred languages, their motivation and engagement increase, leading to a more effective and enjoyable learning process. These studies suggest that student-centred learning in multilingual contexts not only addresses linguistic needs but also acknowledges the individual learning styles and preferences of students, leading to more personalised and effective education.

### **Institutional policies and Multilingual education models**

Tondi and Fredericks (2020) highlight the need for educational institutions to rethink their language policies and embrace multilingual educational models. They underscore the importance of institutional support in the successful implementation of multilingual strategies, suggesting that without top-down support, such initiatives may struggle to gain traction. It aligns with the themes of the systemic review by

emphasising the importance of multilingualism and cultural diversity in academic settings. The article's focus on decolonising knowledge and valuing Indigenous languages resonates with the discourse on enhancing learning and teaching strategies through multilingualism in higher education.

Further considerations from Mphasha (2016) and Subban and Mahlo (2017) argue for the necessity of careful planning and policy development to foster multilingual learning environments. They emphasise that effective multilingual education requires a strategic approach that considers the linguistic diversity of the student population and the institutional capacity to support such diversity.

### **Teacher educator perspectives**

Subban and Mahlo (2017) further reveal diverse attitudes of pre-service teachers towards multilingualism, ranging from enthusiastic support to apprehension. They highlight the need for professional development and training to equip pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to teach in multilingual settings effectively. The articles indicate that educator beliefs and competencies play a crucial role in the success of multilingual education strategies. They suggest that by enhancing educators' understanding and appreciation of multilingualism, institutions can foster a more supportive and effective learning environment for all learners.

## **2.6 Strategies and limitations**

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### **2.6.1. Strategies for implementing Multilingualism**

Several teaching and learning strategies for enhancing Multilingualism in higher education emerge from this chapter:

## CHAPTER 2

- Develop a curriculum framework that supports multilingualism, including bilingual or multilingual course offerings and materials that cater to diverse linguistic backgrounds.
- Provide professional development opportunities for educators to learn about and implement inclusive, multilingual pedagogies.
- Incorporate language learning strategies within subject teaching, emphasizing the development of language skills and subject matter expertise alike.
- Formulate and implement clear language policies that recognize and support the use of multiple languages in academic settings.
- Utilize technology and digital platforms to create adaptable learning environments that can cater to a range of linguistic preferences.
- Allocate resources for research on multilingual education and disseminate findings to inform policy and practice.
- Establish forums, workshops, and discussion groups where multilingualism is promoted, and experiences are shared and celebrated.
- By adopting these strategies, higher education institutions can significantly enhance their curriculum practice and teaching methodologies significantly through multilingualism. Such initiatives not only benefit the linguistic development of pre-service teachers but also contribute to a more inclusive, culturally rich, and intellectually stimulating educational environment.

### **2.6.2. Limitations to the implementation of Multilingualism**

The review acknowledges potential limitations such as language bias, given the focus on English publications, and publication bias, where grey literature or emerging research might have been overlooked. Geographical limitations may also have arisen. This systematic literature review excluded studies published before 2013 and those conducted outside South Africa. Furthermore, the review only considered studies in higher education and excluded primary and secondary education, which restricted the applicability of the findings to other teaching environments. Moreover, only English-language studies were included, and the language of the studies may have limited the scope of the review. Studies using qualitative methods may have been more highly represented in the findings than those using quantitative methods. Finally, owing to time restrictions, only a small number of databases were searched for pertinent studies. Despite these drawbacks, this systematic literature review offers a thorough summary of the state of advancement in research on the integration of multilingualism in higher education.

## **2.7 Concluding thoughts**

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The most interesting fact is that thematic analysis, through the lens of the multilingualism theory, reveals that the majority of the studies affirmatively respond to the research question. *They collectively illustrate how multilingualism influences the development and effectiveness of learning and teaching in higher education.* These publications highlight the benefits, challenges, and innovative approaches associated with multilingualism, emphasizing its significance in shaping contemporary curriculum practice.

## CHAPTER 2

This exploration of multilingualism in higher education highlights its pivotal role in shaping contemporary educational landscapes. The analysis of diverse studies highlights that integrating multilingual approaches in higher education not only enhances learning and teaching strategies but also contributes to the cognitive and cultural development of pre-service teachers. Effective teaching and learning strategies involve the deliberate use of instructional methods that actively engage students, foster critical thinking, and adapt to diverse learning needs, ultimately enhancing students' understanding, retention, and application of knowledge. Multilingualism fosters a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment, accommodating the diverse linguistic backgrounds of pre-service teachers and promoting global interconnectivity. The challenges associated with implementing multilingual strategies, such as policy barriers and the need for pedagogical innovation, are significant yet surmountable obstacles that can be addressed through institutional commitment and strategic planning.

Clear emphasis is emerging from this review that multilingualism is not merely an educational choice, but a necessity in the increasingly interconnected world of higher education. Its integration into learning and teaching strategies is key to preparing pre-service teachers for the complexities of the global landscape. As higher education institutions continue to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by linguistic diversity, the strategies and insights discussed in this chapter offer valuable guidance. Embracing multilingualism in higher education is an investment in a more inclusive, effective, and culturally rich future for global education. Furthermore, investing in research and embracing technological advancements are crucial for advancing multilingualism.

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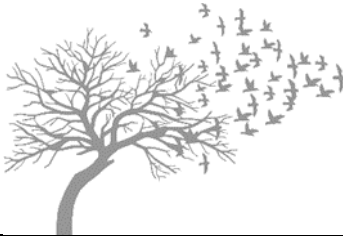
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## CHAPTER 3

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# Advancing pedagogical transformative voices from the peripheries: the role of critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving in the curriculum

*Maele Mononyane and Molaodi Tshelane*

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### Abstract

The urgency to translate pedagogical ideals into actionable classroom practices is the focus of this chapter. Curriculum reform that translates ideals on pedagogies for critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills is the focus of this chapter. Grounded in African Critical Theory (ACT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT), the chapter argues for a view on curriculum as praxis, with an emphasis on a deliberate pedagogic focus on empowering students through enhancing their agency in the design of the learning experience. Using Participatory Action Research (PAR) involving twelve postgraduate students and three academic staff members, the chapter uses empirical data to suggest the implications of the views on learning outcomes and engagement. To develop specific recommendations, the chapter uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to unpack the findings.

**Keywords:** African Critical Theory, Participatory Action Research, Critical Discourse Analysis, critical thinking.

### 3.1 Introduction

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Despite the significant body of research on contemporary challenges in curriculum practices, several areas such as critical thinking, continue to present ongoing questions that have not yet been answered comprehensively. Grounded on African-Centred Critical Theory (ACT), this chapter critiques dominant Western perspectives on critical thinking, offering insights and frameworks rooted in the African experience and diaspora. ACT encompasses a wide range of concepts that address issues of race, culture, identity, power, and liberation (Shale, 2023). Several ideas from ACT relate directly to contemporary curriculum practices and the challenges identified in educational settings. ACT emphasises incorporating African ways of knowing, values, and perspectives into curriculum practices. This approach challenges the Eurocentric bias often found in education systems and supports the inclusion of diverse epistemologies that reflect the histories, cultures, and contributions of African peoples and the diaspora (Shewadeg, 2023). It addresses issues of equity and inclusion by validating and centring knowledge that has been marginalised, thereby tackling double consciousness.

Dickson (1992) points out, as initially coined by W.E.B. du Bois, the concept of 'double consciousness' describes the internal conflict experienced by subordinated groups in an oppressive society, particularly African Americans. In curriculum practices, this concept underscores the need for educational approaches that acknowledge and address the psychological and social tensions faced by students of African descent as a strategy to promote curricula that foster positive racial identities and resilience (Moore, 2005). Within the South African context, the concept of double consciousness is appropriate as it ensures the reconnection with African heritage and expands their influence artistically, intellectually, and socially, including the vast

## CHAPTER 3

African knowledge to deal with all races in our understanding of the world, thereby democratising knowledge. This is the reason why Critical Race Theory is important in this chapter.

While Critical Race Theory (CRT) originates in legal studies; it shares common ground with ACT by examining the role of race and racism in perpetuating social inequity. In terms of education contexts, CRT informs approaches that critically assess how curricula, policies, and practices can perpetuate racial disparities (Teitelbaum, 2022). It advocates for curricular reforms that challenge racist practices and promote racial justice, advancement of knowledge growth proportionately, if not equally, and the sharing of its importance (whether Western or African descent). This focus of the chapter is intended to enable a critical assessment of the inequalities perpetuated by racial disparities.

This is why a concept from Southern Africa, *Ubuntu*, which translates to “I am because we are,” emphasises community, shared humanity, and interdependence. In educational settings, Ubuntu inspires curriculum practices that promote collaboration, empathy, and a sense of belonging (Hlatshwayo *et al.*, 2020). It challenges individualistic approaches to education, advocating for community engagement and learning that fosters mutual respect and solidarity. Harvesting a culture of togetherness within curriculum practices, giving rise to inspire support, the validation of “I can, you can, together we can.” This chapter seeks to demonstrate the value of these concepts in striving to promote racial collaboration to heighten Ubuntu and what it stands for in the curriculum practices spectrum, reiterating “no man is an island.”

ACT focuses on the themes of resistance against oppression and the pursuit of liberation. This perspective encourages curriculum practices that empower students to question dominant narratives, critically engage with social issues, and participate in transformative action for

social justice (Peters, 2018). It also relates to the need for curricula that educate and activate students' agency in challenging injustices. Hence the concept addresses the need for global citizenship education, including African perspectives and contributions (Oderinde & Obadiora, 2024).

Based on the concepts above, by incorporating ACT concepts into curriculum practices, educators and policymakers can address contemporary educational challenges by promoting equity, inclusion, and empowerment for all students, mainly of African descent. These concepts offer a framework for developing curriculum practices responsive to the students' diverse needs and experiences and commitment to social justice and transformation. It is for this reason that Kosnik and Beck (2009) are of the view that curriculum reformists need to explain to teachers the crucial act of applying practical and functional methods of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among learners in the landscape of contemporary education.

All the issues discussed thus far are of concern to contemporary scholars regarding curriculum practices. The ideas embedded in them are relevant to this chapter as they enable insights into the importance of the development of curriculum practices that promote knowledge leading to student emancipation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For instance, in integrating technology in classroom delivery, research indicates that technology can enhance learners' engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes significantly when integrated into curriculum practices effectively. To illustrate this perspective, Pavlova (2013) argues that true transformation can only take place when profound emotions are present alongside the learner's initial involvement. Research has demonstrated that interactive and multimedia materials accommodate a wide range of learning styles and individual demands effectively.



## CHAPTER 3

Nevertheless, they also emphasise the significance of providing teachers with proper training in utilising technology and the potential for widening the gap in access to digital resources among pupils from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The presence of equity and inclusivity concerns highlights the ongoing existence of success gaps and the influence of structural biases in education. Furthermore, studies provide evidence for using culturally responsive teaching and inclusive curriculum designs to enhance equity.

Moreover, studies indicate that learners achieve higher academic and social outcomes when they encounter learning materials and experiences that portray their cultures and identities favourably. Mounting research indicates that education focused on sustainability and global citizenship fosters the development of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and a sense of accountability towards global issues. It is in this context that by incorporating these concepts across the educational programme it can motivate students to participate in intricate matters actively, cultivating a well-informed and proactive global community. The centrality of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning to achieve this cannot be over-emphasised. This is because when learning extends beyond the bounds of individual disciplines, it can boost creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills for complex issues that a single discipline may struggle to address. This chapter thus emphasises the advantages of multidisciplinary education in fostering adaptable thinking and using information from other fields to tackle real-world problems (Yang, 2024).

The crucial connection between learners and teachers' mental health, well-being, and academic achievement is another element that has been well acknowledged. For this reason, research in this area has demonstrated that implementing educational strategies that prioritise mental health, such as social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes, can

lead to positive effects on academic performance, decreased levels of anxiety and depression, and improved social skills among students. The findings of Gucor et al. (2024), for example, suggest that personalised and differentiated learning approaches can address individual learners' specific needs, leading to enhanced engagement, motivation, and academic performance. Other studies consistently demonstrate the efficacy of adaptive learning technologies and differentiated instruction in effectively catering to a wide range of learning styles and abilities. However, Little et al. (2024) demonstrate an increasing agreement in studies that traditional, standardised examinations may not comprehensively measure the entire range of student learning and competencies.

Based on the above body of research, the complexity of contemporary educational challenges and the need for a multifaceted, evidence-based approaches in curriculum practices cannot be over-emphasised. It highlights the importance of continuous innovation, evaluation, and adaptation of educational strategies to meet the evolving needs of students and society. Gaps in knowledge can hinder the development of effective strategies and solutions that empower educational practices that enhance and forge healthier spaces for learning, which accommodate adaptive learning technologies and differentiated instruction in accommodating diverse learning styles and abilities.

### 3.2 Reflections on transforming curriculum practice

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Although Kosnik and Beck (2009) emphasise the significance of contemporary instructional practices and the incorporation of technology for learner engagement and outcomes, it is vital to consider a nuanced critique from an African epistemological standpoint. This viewpoint raises doubts about whether these tactics sufficiently

## CHAPTER 3

encompass the relational and communal learning features fundamental to African knowledge acquisition. The risk is the potential exclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems and the failure to fully integrate these comprehensive educational practices deeply embedded in African environments. Furthermore, discussions on educational reform frequently highlight the broad suitability of teaching methods without considering African students' distinctive cultural, social, and economic circumstances. This lack of attention can result in the implementation of educational strategies that are not in line with most learners' real-life experiences and cultural backgrounds. It is such realities that tend to ultimately undermine the objective of promoting authentic comprehension and thoughtful involvement with knowledge.

In the realm of education, the concept of double consciousness enables us to analyse how current educational practices and reforms may unintentionally reinforce a state of educational double consciousness among African students. This occurs when educational content and teaching methods prioritise Western thinking and disregard the wide range of African perspectives and knowledge. Hence learners face the challenge of navigating a complicated environment where their cultural identities and knowledge systems are not given enough importance or recognition in educational settings. This affects not only their involvement and academic achievements, but also their feeling of identity and self-esteem. The purpose of this critique is not to disregard the importance of promoting critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Instead, it is to advocate for a more comprehensive approach that incorporates and appreciates African ways of knowing and teaching. This method would enhance the capabilities of learners by validating their cultural identities and equipping them with the necessary resources to analyse and reshape their environment.

Essentially, the research discussed so far provides valuable insights into the current challenges and opportunities in education. However, a need still exists to critically reassess these findings by incorporating the importance of African epistemology and the concept of double consciousness. A more comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to curriculum reform is thus needed. It is an approach which considers how learners from African backgrounds acquire knowledge, their experiences, and their aspirations. This critique emphasises the significance of adjusting educational methods to meet the requirements of the contemporary world and ensuring that these methods are based on a profound appreciation for, and incorporation of, the diverse range of knowledge systems that students bring to the learning environment.

### 3.3 Pedagogies for critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving

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Addressing the knowledge gaps in advancing pedagogical transformational voices from marginalised groups is essential to promote a fair and inclusive education system. This can be achieved by incorporating critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills into curriculum practices. Although progress is being made in acknowledging the significance of these skills in education, there are still certain areas where our understanding is restricted. This is particularly the case when it comes to disadvantaged and peripheral groups. For instance, our understanding of how teaching methods that encourage critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving may be successfully adapted and implemented in various educational environments, particularly in marginalised populations, is incomplete. It is vital to comprehend how these tactics might be modified to include local knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices (Santos-Meneses *et al.*, 2023).

## CHAPTER 3

It appears, however, that an understanding is lacking with regard to how teachers in peripheral or marginalised settings can be adequately trained and assisted in implementing these teaching methods. This includes understanding the specific difficulties they encounter, the resources they require, and the most effective professional development programmes to enhance their ability to cultivate these skills in their students. It is in this context that Lekgau (2022) contends that there is even a deficiency in our comprehension of developing and utilising suitable metrics and assessment tools to gauge the effect of incorporating critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills in curriculum practices. This is especially true when it comes to meaningful and relevant ways to peripheral communities.

The reason for this setback is that conventional evaluation techniques may not completely encompass the wide range and profound extent of learning in these domains. Shawaqfeh *et al.* (2024) highlight an increasing focus on pedagogies that prioritise learners' needs and interests. A significant amount of knowledge thus is still to be gained regarding the development and execution of these methods in a manner that genuinely involves learners from various and frequently disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes comprehending how to enable learners to actively participate in their own learning and how to guarantee that their perspectives and experiences are at the core of the learning process.

Gumbo (2016) acknowledges the significance of technology in increasing learning outcomes for critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. However, there is a notable lack of comprehension regarding fair and equal access to technology and its utilisation to bring about educational change in communities that lack resources or are geographically isolated. This involves tackling the challenges of the

digital divide and ensuring that technological solutions are both culturally appropriate and effective in terms of teaching and learning.

According to El-Hamamsy *et al.* (2023) an understanding of how efforts to include these abilities in curriculum practices may be successfully maintained and expanded is lacking; particularly in situations with inadequate resources, political instability, or other obstacles. This entails comprehending the elements contributing to the successful implementation and enduring influence of such initiatives. Researchers, educators, policymakers, and communities must work together to address these gaps. This collaboration should be based on research and practice that considers the specific context, is culturally sensitive, and is responsive to learners and teachers' individual needs and goals in peripheral settings.

### 3.4 Methodology

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The study reported in this chapter adopted the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to generate data. PAR is particularly relevant to advancing pedagogical transformative voices from the peripheries through integrating critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving mastery (Goodman, 2024). Its relevance and connection with ACT further enrich the potential impact of this research approach. To empower peripheral voices, PAR focuses on involving community members as co-researchers in the research process, and this aligns with the goal of amplifying voices from the peripheries.

As part of incorporating PAR, we took seriously our Master and Doctoral students' numerous requests for assistance with proposal writing. To professionalise their involvement in the study, the Convenient Sampling technique was used to select them for participation. This was followed by each team member signing an Informed Consent Form. Consequently

## CHAPTER 3

twelve postgraduate and three supervisory staff members agreed to address their common problems by establishing a team for this study. We agreed to meet every Saturday to discuss our studies and find a way to expedite the understanding of the execution of the project. We spent four hours each time we met.

This approach ensured that the research was grounded in the experiences, needs, and aspirations of those it intended to serve, facilitating the development of pedagogical practices that are relevant and transformative for marginalised communities (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2024). PAR contextualised solutions were used in which the team-building exercise was conducted. Through its iterative process of reflection, action, and evaluation, PAR allows for developing and testing educational strategies tailored to the unique contexts of peripheral communities. In this way, the pedagogical interventions respected and integrated local knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices, addressing a critical gap identified in the study. The study also used gallery walks and fishbowl as tools to generate data. Thus, through the study, building the capacity of co-researchers was also the focal point of the research team. Since PAR emphasises the development of local capacities, empowering teachers and learners in peripheral communities to become agents of change in their educational practices was a success (Nolen, 2024). This choice aligned with the focus of the study, namely on teacher preparation and support, aiming to enhance educators' ability to foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among their students.

### **3.4.1. Africana Critical Theory - Participatory Action Research**

While ACT emphasises the importance of African ways of knowing and understanding the world, PAR's emphasis is on integrating local knowledge and practices in research. Their principles align with each

other as they both seek to valorise and incorporate the epistemological frameworks of peripheral communities. ACT's concept of double consciousness, for example, resonates with PAR's aim to empower participants (Rowan *et al.*, 2024). Through PAR, individuals in peripheral communities have the internal conflict experienced by marginalised groups in recognising their cultural heritage while navigating the dominant culture, articulate PAR's contribution to creating educational practices that affirm their identities and are effective in broader societal contexts. Both PAR and ACT, furthermore, are committed to social justice and transformation principles. PAR serves as a practical methodology for enacting the transformative goals of ACT by engaging marginalised communities in the research process to address inequalities and enact change in educational practices (Abruquah *et al.*, 2023).

In summary, PAR's methodologies and goals are deeply aligned with the principles of ACT, making it a relevant and robust approach to advancing pedagogical transformative voices from the peripheries. Its focus on empowerment, contextualised solutions, capacity building, and sustainable change, complements ACT's emphasis on African epistemology, double consciousness, and social transformation, offering a holistic framework for addressing the challenges identified in the study.

For sustainable and scalable solutions, PAR enables the collaborative and inclusive nature of PAR to foster a sense of ownership among participants, which can lead to more sustainable and scalable educational innovations. This addresses the study's concern with the sustainability and scalability of pedagogical transformations in under-resourced or challenging contexts. Thus this chapter attempts to respond to the following question:



## CHAPTER 3

- How can pedagogical practices that integrate critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving mastery be advanced to amplify transformative voices from the peripheries of curriculum practice?

The related sub-questions were:

- What strategies can be employed to effectively contextualise and implement critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving pedagogies in peripheral educational settings to honour local knowledge systems and cultural practices?
- How can teachers in marginalised or peripheral communities be prepared and supported to foster these pedagogical strategies
- How do these approaches impact student engagement and learning outcomes?

### 3.5 Discussion of findings

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Three levels of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were used to analyse data. These are: power, ideology, and resistance (Fairclough, 2017). These levels were applied in understanding data that appeared in the form of extracts based on participants' utterances during our regular Saturday meetings. The focus of these extracts are on the following aspects of the findings: promotion of pedagogies for critical thinking, self-reflection and active knowledge participation. The focus of the analysis is on the ways in which the fostering of curricula, that empower learner identity, voice, and agency in the learning path, are realised.

### 3.5.1. Pedagogies for critical thinking, self-reflection, and active knowledge participation

It can be argued that critical thinking, self-reflection, and active participation in knowledge processes are foundational to transformative education. As already discussed, the ACT emphasis on the centrality of African epistemologies and the critique of dominant Eurocentric narratives provides a robust framework for reimagining pedagogies that promote the three skills. They also affirm the cultural identities of African and African diaspora learners. In one of the reflective sessions of our Saturday meetings, one of the co-researchers raised a concern as presented below:

*I don't understand how one can be able to become critical and creative. I mean, I am an adult and still find it difficult to be critical and creative. You must know for me to understand these difficult words such as 'epistemology', 'ontology', and 'oxiology', and I need to ask myself 'ithini lento' [what is this thing saying]? If I have to explain to my grandmother at home, now what about our learners at school?*

To analyse the extract above, CDA was deployed, and with infusing the lens of ACT, the study was able to offer a deeper understanding of language as a site of power, ideology, and resistance (Fairclough, 2017). The statement referred to in the above extract, for example, provided a better understanding of the complexities of embracing criticality and creativity within educational contexts, especially when confronted with dense academic jargon. The analysis will thus dissect the statement's implicit meanings, power dynamics, and the interplay between language, knowledge, and identity through the lens of ACT.

### 3.5.2. Textual analysis

The statement begins with a personal admission of difficulty in achieving critical and creative thought, which can be interpreted as acknowledging the challenges posed by traditional educational paradigms that often prioritise rote learning over critical engagement and creative exploration. This admission humanises the speaker and invites empathy from the co-researchers, positioning the speaker as an everyman figure navigating the daunting terrain of academic discourse.

The mention of “difficult words such as ‘epistemology’, ‘ontology’, and ‘axiology’” critiques the accessibility of academic language. From an ACT perspective, this highlights the Eurocentric dominance in producing and disseminating knowledge, which often marginalises non-Western ways of knowing and understanding the world. The invocation of these terms without immediate definitions or applications reflects a barrier to entry for those not initiated into academic circles, reinforcing existing hierarchies of knowledge.

The phrase “*ithini lento*” [what is this thing saying] is a critical juncture in the discourse, emphasising the alienation experienced by individuals when confronted with unfamiliar academic jargon. This linguistic shift to isiXhosa not only grounds the statement in a specific cultural context, but it also signals an act of resistance against the dominance of English in academic discourse. Through ACT, this can be seen as a call for the decolonisation of knowledge, advocating for epistemic diversity that honours and incorporates Indigenous languages and epistemologies.

The concern for the speaker’s grandmother and learners highlights the intergenerational and societal implications of inaccessible academic language. It underscores the need for pedagogical approaches that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and grounded in the lived experiences of learners. From an ACT standpoint, this signals a critique of education systems that fail to bridge the gap between complex academic theories

and practical, everyday knowledge; thus alienating learners from their cultural roots and hindering their ability to engage critically and creatively with the curriculum.

### **3.5.3. Ideological and power dynamics**

The statement by the study participant implicitly critiques the power dynamics inherent in the production and valuation of knowledge, suggesting that academic elitism can alienate individuals from their capacity for critical and creative thought. By questioning the accessibility of academic language, the speaker challenges the hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge systems and advocates for an epistemological pluralism that values diverse ways of knowing.

In conclusion, using ACT as a lens, this CDA reveals the statement as a multifaceted critique of the barriers to critical and creative engagement in education, rooted in the dominance of inaccessible academic language and Eurocentric epistemologies. It underscores the need for educational practices that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and attuned to the diverse epistemological backgrounds of all learners. Through this analysis, the statement emerges as a personal reflection and a call for action to decolonise knowledge and democratise the educational landscape.

Analysing the statement through CDA and ACT involves examining how language reflects, reinforces, or challenges power structures – particularly in the context of education and knowledge production (Gavriely-Nuri, 2012). CDA focuses on the role of discourse in society and power relations. At the same time, ACT provides a lens for scrutinising these dynamics from the perspective of African and African diaspora experiences, centring on issues of race, power, and the decolonisation of knowledge. We can also look at the extract from a social structural level to make sense of it.

### **3.5.4. Social structural level analysis**

The statement reflects the reproduction of power hierarchies within educational systems, by which specific knowledges and thinking are privileged over others. The mention of difficulty in understanding academic terms such as “epistemology,” “ontology,” and “axiology” suggests a barrier to entry for individuals who are not familiar with the academic language, or who do not have access to higher education, perpetuating social inequalities by reinforcing the marginalisation of individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds and/or non-Western cultural contexts.

From an ACT perspective, the dominance of Eurocentric academic language and concepts marginalise African epistemologies and ways of knowing. By centring Western knowledge systems, educational institutions uphold colonial legacies that devalue Indigenous knowledges and perpetuate Eurocentric worldviews. The reference to explaining concepts to the speaker’s grandmother at home highlights the disconnect between academic knowledge and everyday lived experiences, particularly within African communities, where traditional knowledge systems may be sidelined or invalidated.

The shift to isiXhosa with “*ithini lento*” challenges the hegemony of English in academic discourse and asserts the value of Indigenous languages in knowledge production. However, this linguistic resistance also highlights the broader power dynamics at play, where English proficiency and adherence to Western academic norms are often equated with intelligence and success (Van Dijk, 2001), reinforcing social inequalities by marginalising individuals who do not conform to these standards or who are not fluent in English.

It is for these reasons that the statement may also be said to be implicitly raising questions about the role of education in social mobility and access to opportunities. Acknowledging the difficulty in understanding

academic concepts, the speaker confronts the structural barriers that hinder upward mobility for marginalised groups. From an ACT perspective, this highlights the need for educational systems to recognise and validate diverse forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, particularly those rooted in African cultural traditions.

The statement can thus be seen as a call for structural transformation within educational institutions to make knowledge more accessible and inclusive. It also challenges the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems and advocates for the integration of indigenous epistemologies and languages, calling for a decolonisation of education that recognises and values learners' diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Based on the above, using CDA and ACT to analyse the statement from a social structural level reveals how language and discourse perpetuate power hierarchies and social inequalities within educational systems. By highlighting the marginalisation of African epistemologies and the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems, the analysis underscores the need for structural transformation to make education more inclusive, accessible, and empowering for all learners, particularly those from marginalised communities (Chilton, 2005). This analysis calls for a decolonisation of education that recognises and validates diverse forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, ultimately challenging the status quo and advocating for social justice within educational institutions.

We can also use the third level to analyse the extract above from a discursive level of analysis. Analysing the statement through CDA and ACT from a discursive level involves examining how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social relations. This analysis will focus on how the discourse in the statement shapes perceptions of knowledge, education, and identity, particularly within the context of African and diasporic experiences.

### **3.5.5. Discursive level analysis**

The statement begins with an expression of uncertainty and difficulty in understanding concepts such as “critical” and “creative,” highlighting a power asymmetry within educational discourse, reflecting the dominance of certain forms of knowledge and ways of thinking that are often associated with Western academia while marginalising alternative perspectives. From an ACT perspective, this reflects the Eurocentric control over knowledge production and dissemination, perpetuating power imbalances and reinforcing colonial legacies.

The shift to isiXhosa with “ithini lento” challenges the linguistic hegemony of English in educational discourse, asserting the value and legitimacy of African languages. This linguistic resistance challenges English dominance and affirms the importance of linguistic diversity in shaping identity and knowledge. Through an ACT lens, this moment can be seen as an act of linguistic sovereignty, reclaiming space for African languages and challenging the erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems.

The concern about explaining academic concepts to the speaker’s grandmother at home highlights the disconnect between academic knowledge and lived experiences within African communities, underscoring the importance of culturally relevant education that reflects and affirms learners’ identities and experiences. From an ACT perspective, this reflects a call for decolonising education and centring African epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies in the curriculum to empower learners and validate their cultural heritage.

The difficulty in understanding academic terms such as “epistemology” and “ontology” points to barriers to access and inclusion within educational institutions, highlighting the exclusionary nature of academic discourse, which can alienate individuals from non-academic backgrounds or with limited access to formal education. From a CDA

perspective, this discourse reflects the reproduction of power structures that privilege certain forms of knowledge and marginalise others, perpetuating social inequalities (Fairclough, 2017).

The statement can be seen as a call for pedagogical transformation within educational institutions to make knowledge more accessible, inclusive, and empowering. By challenging the dominance of Western academic norms and advocating for the integration of African epistemologies and languages, it calls for a decolonisation of education that recognises the diversity of learners' experiences and validates their cultural identities. This analysis underscores the importance of language in shaping perceptions of knowledge, education, and identity and highlights the need for discursive practices that empower rather than marginalise marginalised communities.

Based on the above, using CDA and ACT to analyse the statement from a discursive level reveals how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social relations within educational discourse. By highlighting the barriers to access and inclusion, and the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity, the analysis underscores the need for pedagogical transformation that recognises and validates learners' diverse experiences and identities, particularly within African and diasporic communities. This analysis calls for a decolonisation of education that challenges linguistic hegemony, centres on African epistemologies, and empowers learners to engage with knowledge on their terms critically.

### **3.5.6. Fostering curricula that empower learner identity, voice, and agency in learning paths**

*When I joined this team, I initially felt the way things are done here is unprofessional. I could not make presentations to the entire team and subject my work to criticism by almost everyone,*



## CHAPTER 3

*breaking it into pieces. I initially believed that your research work was between you and your supervisor. However, I have a different belief now. I enjoy every minute of presenting in front of brilliant minds because of the validity checked by many, forcing me to think prudently. I feel I am indebted to this team.*

Looking at the extract above, it seems that the co-researcher changed her identity. An analysis of the extract above enables far better insights when CDA and ACT are used. When this is done from the textual and spoken word level, which involves examining the language used, the power dynamics at play, and the implications for knowledge production and social relations, the meanings become clearer.

### **3.5.7. Textual and spoken word level analysis**

When the textual and spoken word analysis is carried out in relation to the initial statement about feeling that the team's practices were unprofessional and experiencing criticism from almost everyone suggests power dynamics within the team. Using terms such as "unprofessional" and "subject my work to criticism" reflects negative perceptions and feelings of vulnerability. From an ACT perspective, this demonstrates the reproduction of power hierarchies within academic spaces, where certain voices are privileged over others, contributing to the marginalisation of dissenting perspectives.

The extract also highlights a shift in perspective, with the participant initially believing that research work is solely between the individual and their supervisor, but later realising the value of presenting to the entire team and receiving diverse feedback. This shift can transform the speaker's understanding of knowledge production and collaboration. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that shape perceptions of professionalism, collaboration, and the role of feedback in academic settings.

The speaker expresses appreciation for the validation and critical engagement received from the team, stating that it has forced them to think more prudently, suggesting that social validation and constructive criticism play a significant role in shaping knowledge production and intellectual growth within the team. From an ACT perspective, this can be seen as an affirmation of the communal nature of knowledge production within African and diasporic communities, where collaboration and collective wisdom are valued over individual achievement.

The concluding statement about feeling indebted to the team suggests a sense of belonging and gratitude for the support and intellectual stimulation, highlighting the importance of community and collective empowerment in fostering academic growth and development. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that shape social relations and identities within academic spaces, reinforcing the idea that knowledge production is a collaborative and communal endeavour.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that analysing the extract through the lenses of CDA and ACT from the textual and spoken word levels reveals insights into power dynamics, knowledge production, and social relations within academic teams. The analysis highlights the importance of collaboration, feedback, and communal support in shaping perspectives and fostering intellectual growth. It also underscores how language and discourse shape perceptions of professionalism, collaboration, and community within academic spaces, reflecting broader societal norms and power structures. The extract illustrates the transformative potential of collective engagement and critical dialogue in knowledge production and academic development.

Analysing the extract using CDA and ACT from a social structural level involves examining how language and discourse reflect broader power structures, social relations, and ideologies within academic settings.

### **3.5.8. Social structural level analysis**

The initial feeling of perceiving the team's practices as unprofessional and experiencing criticism from almost everyone highlights power dynamics within academic spaces, suggesting the existence of hierarchical structures in which certain individuals or perspectives are privileged over others. From an ACT perspective, this reflects the reproduction of colonial legacies within academic institutions, where Eurocentric norms and standards dominate and marginalise dissenting voices, particularly those from marginalised communities (Rabaka, 2006).

The shift in perspective regarding the value of presenting to the entire team and receiving feedback suggests a re-evaluation of norms surrounding knowledge production within the academic team, highlighting the influence of social norms and practices in shaping how knowledge is produced and validated. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that reinforce certain norms and ideologies within academic communities, contributing to maintaining power structures and social hierarchies (Chilton, 2005).

The speaker's acknowledgement of the value of social validation and critical engagement from the team indicates the importance of collective input and collaboration in fostering intellectual growth and development, suggesting that social relations within the academic team play a significant role in shaping knowledge production processes and individual learning experiences. From an ACT perspective, this can be seen as an affirmation of communal knowledge production practices within African and diasporic communities, where collaboration and collective wisdom are valued over individual achievement.

The statement expressing indebtedness to the team suggests a sense of belonging and community within the academic environment, highlighting the importance of social support and camaraderie in

fostering academic success and well-being. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that shape social identities and relations within academic spaces, reinforcing the idea that knowledge production is a collective endeavour that requires collaboration and mutual support (Wodak, 2006).

Based on the above, it can be concluded that analysing the extract through the lenses of CDA and ACT from a social structural level provides insights into power dynamics, social norms, and communal practices within academic settings. The analysis highlights the influence of social structures and relations in shaping knowledge production processes and individual experiences within the academic team. It also underscores the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and community to support academic success and well-being (Rabaka, 2014). The extract illustrates the interconnectedness of language, social structures, and knowledge production within academic environments, reflecting broader societal norms and power dynamics.

Analysing the extract from a discursive level using CDA and ACT involves examining how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social relations within academic contexts.

### **3.5.9. Discursive level analysis**

The initial expression of feeling that the team's practices are "unprofessional" and the experience of subjecting one's work to criticism suggests a negotiation of power dynamics within the academic team. Using terms such as "unprofessional" and "subject to criticism" reflects a perception of vulnerability and a power asymmetry within the team. From an ACT perspective, this demonstrates the reproduction of power hierarchies within academic spaces, where certain voices are privileged over others, contributing to the marginalisation of dissenting perspectives.

## CHAPTER 3

The subsequent statement about experiencing a shift in perspective, finding value in presenting to the entire team, and receiving feedback suggests a transformation in the speaker's understanding of knowledge production and collaboration. This shift can be interpreted as adapting to the academic team's discursive practices and norms. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that shape perceptions of professionalism, collaboration, and the role of feedback in academic settings.

Acknowledging the value of social validation and critical engagement from the team suggests that social relations within the academic team play a significant role in shaping knowledge-production processes and individual learning experiences, underscoring the importance of communal support and collaboration in fostering intellectual growth and development. From an ACT perspective, this can be seen as an affirmation of communal knowledge production practices within African and diasporic communities, where collaboration and collective wisdom are valued over individual achievement (Bassey, 2007).

The statement expressing indebtedness to the team indicates a sense of belonging and community within the academic environment, highlighting the importance of social support and camaraderie in fostering academic success and well-being. From a CDA perspective, this reflects discursive practices that shape social identities and relations within academic spaces, reinforcing the idea that knowledge production is a collective endeavour that requires collaboration and mutual support.

Based on the above, analysing the extract from a discursive level using CDA and ACT provides insights into how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social relations within academic contexts. The analysis highlights the negotiation of power dynamics, the importance of social validation and collaboration, and the

role of communal support in fostering intellectual growth and well-being within academic teams. The extract illustrates how language and discourse shape perceptions and experiences within academic environments, reflecting broader societal norms and power dynamics.

### 3.6 Conclusion

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In conclusion, the analysis of the extract through CDA and ACT has provided valuable insights into the complex dynamics at play within academic spaces. From a social structural level, we observed the reproduction of power hierarchies and the marginalisation of dissenting voices, reflecting broader societal norms and inequalities. The shift in perspective and acknowledgement of the value of social validation highlighted the transformative potential of communal knowledge production practices within African and diasporic communities, emphasising the importance of collaboration and collective wisdom. At the discursive level, we delved into how language constructs and reflects power dynamics, ideologies, and social relations within academic contexts. The key themes that emerged from the analysis were the negotiation of power dynamics, the importance of social validation and collaboration, and the sense of community and belonging. These findings underscore the interconnectedness of language, social structures, and knowledge production processes within academic environments, shedding light on the complex interplay between discourse, power, and identity.

Overall, the analysis has deepened our understanding of the multifaceted nature of academic discourse and its implications for social relations and knowledge production. It highlights the need for critical reflection on the discursive practices and power dynamics within academic spaces and the importance of fostering inclusive and collaborative environments that recognise and value diverse

## CHAPTER 3

perspectives and experiences. It is imperative to continue interrogating and challenging dominant discourses and power structures to create more equitable and empowering academic spaces for all moving forward.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# The place of knowledge, graduate attributes and technology in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century higher education curriculum

*Pulane A Molomo*

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the complexities and challenges for higher education curriculum transformation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. More specifically, the focus is on the ways in which such transformation could place equal value to disciplinary knowledge, graduate attributes, and technology. In other words, how to enable students to learn so that they can use acquired disciplinary knowledge, graduate attributes, and technology to enable them to adapt to changes brought about by 21<sup>st</sup>-century demands. By means of a literature review as a research methodological choice, the chapter explores the value of placing disciplinary knowledge, graduate attributes, and technology side by side in the centre of the curriculum.

**Keywords:** graduate attributes, higher education curriculum, emotional intelligence, technologically savvy graduates.

## 4.1 Introduction

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The concept '*transformation*' in the curriculum discourse realm must be understood broadly for content selection and pedagogical delivery to be revised. Questions that need to be answered when thinking of curriculum transformation include, amongst other things, the purpose of curriculum, the kind of society that needs to be developed, socio-economic needs, curriculum relevancy, and its alignment to the current epoch. Bernstein (2000) differentiates curriculum into internal and external components to serve different functions provided by different knowledge types covered by disciplinary knowledge and skills. Equally, serious considerations of the environment in which the curriculum is enacted must be reflected. These include the drastic changes brought about by global trends, knowledge expansion, technological advancements, curriculum relevancy, changes in student demographics, and ever-changing workplace needs. At the same time, ways of accessing knowledge vary, making it obligatory for individuals to be exposed to a curriculum that provides prospective graduates with relevant knowledge and skills, compatible with the times they live in.

Besides, there has been a growing interest in the value of graduate attributes in education and business (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Thus, curriculum reforms, that create space for developing competency-based and interdisciplinary elements, are seen as novel, relevant, and encompassing to respond to socio-economic needs (Caspersen, Frølich & Muller, 2017). However, Eraut (2012) indicates that a gap exists between knowledge needed at the workplace and knowledge and skills produced through formal education contributing towards the development of character and attitude. On the other hand, the 21<sup>st</sup> century of technological advancement demands certain graduate attributes, dynamism from its workforce, and knowledge of the job. Hence skills required at the workplace are important to be considered

## CHAPTER 4

for graduates' trajectory (Cimatti, 2016). However, within the current curriculum delivery, graduate attributes as another type of knowledge, are relegated to the periphery and are not regarded as important, and this has contributed to the socio-economic challenges in the country including unhealthy behavioural traits.

Furthermore, the socio-economic success of governments rely on citizens' capacity to compete and adapt to global trends and existing technological developments. Undoubtedly, alongside theoretical knowledge content, graduate attributes need to be integrated into the curriculum to set the stage for active learning, socialization amongst peers, the enhancement of self-efficacy, and technical know-how (Ballen *et al.*, 2017). In the same breath, most graduates want to be employed in formal esteemed professions that are productive. However, employers complain about the poor development of attributes, referred to as 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills.

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and Experiential Learning can be used to enable students to gradually master different competencies by moving teaching, learning, and assessment beyond the university to work-based scenarios (Molomo, 2021; Cheng *et al.*, 2014). Such a trajectory can allow for the development of both cognitive and social aspects of learning to be integrated and positioned better at the centre of the curriculum to navigate different social contexts. The purpose is to enhance competencies and knowledge for the workplace, personal development, and other roles in society to be able to solve problems (Smith & Worsfold, 2015; Lyu & Liu, 2021). Moreover, Patel (2003) indicates that graduates need to develop cognitive and graduate attributes across disciplines. This suggests that the development and success of students rely on the type of curriculum content that exposes them to modern-day demands, hence a need to seek knowledge

pluralism which emphasises knowledge based on scientific truths and applications including technological know-how (Wald & Harland, 2019).

Competencies are classified by different names which all have a common meaning and in certain quarters they are referred to as soft skills, generic skills, or graduate attributes. In this chapter the term graduate attributes will be used. Questions to ponder must be on how to place value on graduate attributes which must be at the core of a transformed 21<sup>st</sup>-century curriculum. It is against this background that the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the relevancy of curriculum in addressing the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century by first discussing the needs of different role players who are expected to benefit from curriculum change. Secondly, the focus would be on the development of graduate attributes and why their value needs to be recognised in the curriculum. Thirdly, the chapter explores the social dimension of graduate attributes in shaping character and attitude including the pursuit of lifelong learning. Thus the transference of graduate attributes is to be treated as assets.

## 4.2 Literature Review

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### 4.2.1. Curriculum for all

Bernstein (1975) argues that curriculum is regulated by a set of norms that follows a dynamic process whereby, at a certain period, a particular content can be transformed following the prevailing surrounding international and national perspectives. At the same time, curriculum is associated with different people where it operates, ranging from interest groups, institutions, society, and businesses who all have an interest in how curriculum addresses the needs of the society, and economic progress, including fostering relations among different stakeholders (Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen, 2016). Curriculum relevance is

## CHAPTER 4

the prime factor for curriculum transformation which is influenced by students, lecturers, employers, businesses, and advisory board members as main stakeholders in tertiary education (Nagarajan & Edwards, 2014).

Consequently the needs of all parties involved need to be fulfilled. Undoubtedly, curriculum reform becomes a contested terrain that is surrounded by complex social and economic features accompanied by various needs and logic of different stakeholders (Shay, 2015). In fact, Brits (2018) raises concern about the mounting pressure from the government and the business sector on the value of competencies which brings a new perspective on how to improve curriculum to cover the development of certain personal and professional traits. Other than that, the prevailing demands of the world of work, societal challenges, and world trends show that human capital is significant and the provision of soft skills without compromising hard skills needs to be considered in transforming curriculum (Anthony, 2014). Hence changes in the curriculum are necessary to convey knowledge and skills that are relevant to address varying needs, including the development of the kind of graduates who are able to cope with 21<sup>st</sup>-century demands (Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020).

The increasing needs brought about by global trends and socio-economic demands require changes in curriculum content to be effected by placing value on the development of competencies that complement knowledge (Villar-Onrubia & Rajpal, 2016). The view is also supported by Qizi (2020) who maintains that Higher Education not only has the responsibility of providing students with hard skills to prepare them to become professionals, but should also develop graduate attributes that enable them to play a role in civic matters contributing towards positive development of a society. In other words, curriculum is considered relevant, meaningful, and effective when it contributes to

students' holistic development and success (Ibid). It is for this reason that approaches and changes in the curriculum need to align with the present needs including choosing theories that place learners at the centre of the curriculum (Ibid).

Faced with the reality that not all graduates find employment after completing their studies, long-term benefits of graduate attributes find significance when they vary, interconnect, display complexity, professionalism, political, contextual, and cultural relevance, and invest in human capital for a lifelong span (Hora M; Benbow R & Oleson A, 2016). This brings the notion that other different approaches to looking at graduate attributes that embrace contextual cultural differences must also be considered in the soft skills competencies agenda, to bring all on board instead of only using a single international blanket umbrella approach that matches mainly the needs and cultural context of countries where the idea of soft skills originated (Ibid). "Curriculum for all" focuses on giving students new skill sets for both the labour market and leadership development as human capital skills that will stay with graduates for a lifetime (Abenathy, 2018).

Transforming curriculum to fit into international standards policymakers in localised settings are cautioned not to devalue cultural relevancy including people's voices in a democratic dispensation (de Wit, Gacel-Avila, Jones & Jooste, 2017). Besides, a balanced curriculum that caters to varying contextual and global needs of different stakeholders makes sense when it liberates people by equipping them with knowledge and skills that are not only needed in the marketplace but also by those that contribute towards building sound personalities and acceptable traits that contribute to the success of the nation (Freire, 1992, cited in Gibson, 1999). Following Paul Freire 's notion of a liberated nation, changes in the curriculum are necessary to serve and save society from



## CHAPTER 4

social, economic, and political deprivation by equipping the nation with self-sustaining relevant coping skills and knowledge.

Arguably, universal scientific principles matter in curriculum discourse. However, the cultural capital paradigm coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) brings in the notion of considering contextual and cultural dynamics in the development of competencies by dispelling the myth of dichotomising graduate attributes as non-cognitive skills, labelled as simple skills and hard skills classified as complex cognitive skills (Hora *et al.*, 2016). Such a view places focus on how graduate attributes are taught, that they too require the same serious approach given to hard skills and the use of certain expertise to develop them as lifetime traits to enhance different competencies that enhance knowledge and expertise of the job (Ibid). An example given by (Ibid) about the value of communication as a skill in a professional nursing context is the way information is conveyed to patients which reveal elements of social and cultural norms that accompany the professional knowledge as not an overnight activity, but a process that follows planned activities to be imparted and efficiently learned.

Research also reveals that curriculum provision in higher education is not only meant to prepare students for job employment but to provide them with knowledge, technical expertise, and skills that can enable them to participate and make informed decisions in a pluralistic democracy to realize human rights principles such as respect for dignity, civic engagement responsibilities, ethical behaviour, and sustainability issues (Hora, Benhow & Oleson, 2016). Graduate attributes are thus perceived as predicting individuals' success in various spheres of life (Cinque, 2016). On the other hand, society expects graduates to be proactive, critical, and engaged citizens who can perform leadership roles, and exemplify sound behaviour, including the ability to analyse and solve problems (Bitzer & Withering, 2020).

Curriculum transformation is necessary to equip students with knowledge, skills, and technology to tackle the demands and expectations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Pachauri & Yadav, 2014). This means that apart from cognitive abilities that are to be developed, individuals are expected to display personal qualities that emerge from the integration of generic skills, knowledge, and technology. Contrastingly, Truong, Laura & Shaw (2015) argue that the development of graduate attributes in the curriculum is still devalued in the academic discourse. As a result, graduate attributes are not efficiently developed to allow individuals to enhance their level of performance by using social skills that are outside the radius of the profession to reach a high level of efficiency (Grisi, 2014). In the Australian context, graduate attributes referred to as soft skills are highly valued and are perceived to attract job opportunities which are estimated to cover two-thirds of different jobs by 2030 (DeakinCo, 2017).

Similarly, foundational principles underlying disciplines are not the only capabilities that are needed in the world of work, there is a great need for competencies that serve the purpose of enhancing the efficiency of hard skills. Thus Geissler, Edison & Wayland (2012) posit that employees in their professional space can be able to communicate and work effectively in cross-functional teams through the development of non-professional skills. The implication thereof is that generic skills and technological competencies must not be undervalued in the curriculum. Despite the focus on elevating graduate attributes to be located side by side with disciplinary knowledge (Nell & Bosman, 2017) brings to light the notion that Higher Education Institutional policies are implemented without carefully looking at the contextual dynamics of positioning graduate attributes (Ibid), this highlights their importance and the need to strengthen staff development to ensure that staff integrate content and graduate attributes effectively.

## CHAPTER 4

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century knowledge expansion further requires an integrated curriculum model that transcends all disciplines by focusing on the knowledge students must possess, how it impacts character development focusing on what kind of citizens they will become, what they will do, or how the acquired knowledge and skills will be demonstrated (Drake & Reid, 2018). Furthermore, the idea of an integrated curriculum changes the classification of some of the competencies that were regarded as non-cognitive skills to complex skills. Some of the competencies or graduate attributes such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, information management, and creativity showing what a graduate can do are currently considered complex skills and recall falling under the knowledge type has shifted to a low-order skill (Ibid).

### **4.2.2. Graduate attributes and technology**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century, as characterised by changes in technology and practical skills therefore requires a transformation from a traditional approach to a curriculum that does not only place more value on disciplinary knowledge and less on skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and others, that are most relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world (Sarumaha, Jaya, Nofirman, Padilah & Khobir, 2023). It is to be noted that the growing global demands require curriculum to oscillate towards the currently needed skills in alignment with human-centred philosophical approaches including the transference of socio-cognitive skills (Ibid). Since much attention has been given to hard skills and less to graduate attributes, Clarke (2017) and Ciappei and Cinque (2014) a transformed curriculum has some implications for balancing the scale by placing value both on content knowledge and skills.

Remarkably, the advent of global trends and digital technology raised the prominence of graduate attributes as favourable cross-cutting skills that are valued more by companies during the recruitment and hiring

process (Ibourk & El Aynaoui, 2023). The implication is that companies contribute towards the economic success of the country; therefore graduate attributes are significant in driving the economy. As a result, they need to be recognised in the curriculum. Dell' Aquila *et al.* (2016) indicate that graduate attributes are adaptable skills that are in demand in the labour market. This means that institutions or companies' ability to produce or perform is influenced by knowledge and intrapersonal skills employees possess and use for socio-economic success.

The evolution of technology plays a huge role in today's life, and as such technological skills need to be integrated into the curriculum to prepare students for the world they live in. As posited by Guo, Xie, Jiang, Huang, Chen and Xue (2019) the internet has currently infiltrated the socio-economic livelihoods of societies and has an impact on traditional ways of doing things that are now replaced by technology and digital tools such as virtual conferences, online meetings, emails, including pedagogical delivery that are also done online. Following Costley (2014) technology brings many benefits in its daily usage to many students as it opens for them opportunities to explore different avenues, communicate easily and faster with others as well as enabling communication, and motivation which creates confidence amongst individuals. To students, it seems to bring greater satisfaction by making learning relevant and meaningful enabling students to engage with what they see and find in the environment (Daniela, Strods & Kalinina, 2019).

The founder and Executive Chairman Klaus Schwab, in the book cited in Schwab & Davis (2018) gives a practical companion and field guide about the Fourth Industrial Revolution in influencing how we do things, how it affects the functionality of economies and governments including its impact on humanity. Other than that, the competitive edge in the economic domain requires a curriculum that incorporates digital

## CHAPTER 4

technology skills to enhance students' adaptability in the employment world and life in general (Castro-Guzman, 2021). It is within these realities that transformation in the curriculum is necessary to embrace different angles that can lead toward the progress and development of a society.

Similarly, the research done by (Henrikson, Mishra & Fisser, 2016) shows a synergy between information, communication technology, and creativity as one of the personality traits. Technology contributes towards increasing efficiency and the high level of quality at the workplace and cannot function solely without human input, hence graduates who possess the best technological skills are in demand (Barbara, 2016). The assertion made by (Drake & Reid, 2018) is that memorisation of facts in isolation is no longer a productive way of gathering knowledge, it needs the complement of skills. Hence, communication skills as part of graduate attributes when linked to technology in the curriculum afford students and the broader public the opportunity to connect in a wider variety of contexts (Ibid). Furthermore, knowledge and technological expansion has shifted to lifelong learning to make sense of the huge information learners are exposed to.

Additionally, the practical application of skills and technological applications in the process of learning is preferred by many students to boost their confidence in using their inherent traits and collaborating with others to find solutions to problems in their socioeconomic, and political environment (Ballen, Wieman, Salehi, Searle & Zamudio, 2017). Most researchers revealed the importance of change and innovation to match current socio-economic needs, and the enhancement of performance to register progress (Serdyukov, 2017). Therefore, the use of technology is another component of the curriculum that needs to be integrated to link to other best practices that can contribute towards

change and the advancement of society. This means that curriculum has a plural factor as it relates to different stakeholders and impacts all who live in the rapidly changing technological and knowledge expansion.

### **4.2.3. Graduate attributes and their value**

According to Bester (2014) and Khan (2018) the discourse on soft skills which can be referred to as generic skills, graduate attributes, unified skills, 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, capabilities, indispensable skills, or key competencies is in higher demand in the work marketplace. Even though they are used interchangeably, the term graduate attributes has been chosen, and they are needed in workplaces and social settings. The discourse on soft skills or graduate attributes started in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States of America. In Australia, for example, the view is that graduate attributes must be developed as solutions for employment opportunities (Bester, 2014).

Graduate attributes are also referred to as employability skills and are associated with employment success and life wisdom (Patacsil & Tableting, 2017). This means that soft skills can enable students to learn wisdom, values, and principles that sustain diverse societies and contribute to their reputations. Graduate attributes are also intrapersonal skills that play a significant role in the achievement of strategic goals of the company by employees, the expectation is that employees must be able to communicate effectively with colleagues and clients and be able to take part in activities that need teamwork (Khalid & Ahmad, 2021). Teamwork as another feature of graduate attributes is also regarded as an important facet in the learning process as it opens an opportunity for students to fulfil one of the roles of education namely, to socialise and form relationships with others (Biesta, 2013).

## CHAPTER 4

As posited by Robes (2012) graduate attributes also fit into the classification of character traits and are displayed through attitude and behaviour which cannot be regulated through technical prowess or knowledge mastery, such that individuals in leading positions who do not use technical or disciplinary knowledge to manage, negotiate or mediate, they instead apply personal competencies to solve problems. On the other hand, Emotional Intelligence as another related skill with a sociological lineage which at the same time is linked to performance, encompasses several personality traits namely, social graces, personal habits, and optimism to compliment hard skills (Cinque, 2015; Kingsley, 2015). According to Yepes Zuluaga (2024) Emotional Intelligence and other related skills are also valued by society and the workplace as they enable individuals to express their emotions, understand them, and control them whilst strategically using them in maintaining composure during stress either in the workplace or social situations to manage one's emotions (Kingsley, 2015). As a result, both hard skills and soft skills synonymously referred to as graduate attributes play a major role in developing hardy personalities that can flexibly help individuals to navigate through challenges brought by the workplace and personal ones; hence they are mostly valued by employers (Ibid).

Noticeably, graduate attributes are perceived as new skills that support effective communication, innovation, creativity, flexibility, decision-making, and collaboration including problem-solving (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017). They can serve as enablers for people to become creative and to think out of the box by stimulating thoughts that can lead people to also create jobs for themselves. Hence some graduates are also exploring entrepreneurship by identifying gaps and opportunities in their socio-economic environments. According to Gibb (2014) graduate attributes are linked to capabilities people are born with that are further developed to navigate complexities. In the same breath, Ibourk & El Aynaoui (2023) note that graduate attributes are

most favoured in the labour market and therefore are important for the general holistic development of students.

Graduate attributes are further referred to as cultural capital confirming the idea that they are not simple, add-on skills or competencies – they are on the contrary tied to social and cultural norms with varied nuances that are displayed differently by other cultural groups (Hora, Benbow & Oleson, 2016). For example, assertiveness and confidence may be displayed by looking others straight in the eye but in some other cultures, it may be interpreted differently. Mindful of the inherent process of instilling graduate attributes, it requires professional expertise to prepare graduates to be able to apply such skills in real-life situations (Ibid). The perspective brought by Hora *et al.* (2018) is the idea that such skills observe professional norms of certain professions and are learned gradually through exposure and learning opportunities that are created. To Bourdieu (1986:248) skills or attributes development is a process that takes some time to be learned which can be compared to building a muscular physique. This idea therefore corroborates the idea that graduate attributes are to be valued and given the appropriate attention given to disciplinary knowledge.

The classification and differentiation made by Hora *et al.* (2016) between the Cultural Capital Paradigm and the Soft Skills Paradigm vary slightly in their perspectives and the weight placed on competencies. With the Soft Skill Paradigm, a dichotomy is maintained that clusters hard skills as cognitive complex skills while soft skills are seen as non-cognitive skills and this reduces complex skills such as critical thinking and communication skills to a non-cognitive level, even though they are considered workplace-needed skills while the memorisation of concepts packaged in hard skills is at low hierarchy level compared to critical-thinking appearing in the non-cognitive cluster (Ibid). On the other hand, the Cultural Capital Paradigm according to (Ibid) does not blame



## CHAPTER 4

institutions of learning or students for the lack of employability requirements – rather, it looks at structural, cultural, and socioeconomic challenges that deny students opportunities of possessing the required capabilities seen as a priority in leveraging employment.

Included in the benefit of graduate attributes is the notion of the human capital leadership development as part of the competency or graduate attributes transformational discourse of new skill sets (Robes, 2012). Leadership is viewed as a process-oriented competency sought after in the workplace career ladder and socio-political and civic engagements (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020). Interaction with a diversified host of people is another positive personality trait that is valued as a leadership quality by society, to those who are leading teams, by maintaining a team spirit and at the same time exposing a leader to make correct and ethical decisions (Brungardt, 2011). The cultivation of competencies such as leadership skills, communication, teamwork, and self-discipline including the ability to influence others also correlates with high performance, which raises the expectation for Higher Education to plan curriculum activities in a way that they give students ample and gradual opportunities to reach their maximum level of development (Karagianni & Jude Montgomery, 2018).

### **4.2.4. Knowledge of the curriculum and social benefits**

All education institutions have a contribution to make towards shaping a desired society and this has a bearing on a variety of influences in the environment that warrants attention for knowledge that empowers society (Davies, 2016). Hence the need for intellectual power to engage and shape the moral fibre of the greater society and to remedy the moral decline gives eminence to competencies as having more value beyond mere skills including technological knowhow, which is also at the heart of a curriculum that is socially inclined (Wheelahan, 2010). This means that the curriculum needs to embrace values that are cherished

by society in consideration of other environmental, economic, and political nuances that are submerged in the curriculum to address the different needs of society.

It can be noted that the weight placed on the cognitive aspect of the curriculum in higher education institutions in South Africa seems to reduce the focus on the social dimension to zero, which contributes to the perpetuation of inequalities and a skewed representation of some of the stakeholders (Blignaut, 2021). The contention is that students cannot be prepared solely for the world of work while overlooking their moral obligations as responsible and critical citizens who function in a democratic society. The implication is that the focus must not rely heavily on Western epistemologies, but consideration must also be given to Indigenous epistemologies as part of the pluralism and diversification of needs to be embraced in the curriculum. The social element of the curriculum thus reiterates the idea that knowledge is not a supernatural phenomenon, but is socially generated (Young, 2008), which means that the curriculum must consider the society is supposed to serve. This has further implications for the type of graduates that are to be developed to fit to context and other contributory factors at play in entirety.

Hoppers's (2016) contestation considers knowledge pluralisation to accommodate different knowledge types to embrace multiple needs of society. This implies involving and satisfying all stakeholders that are affected by the curriculum including consideration on embracing the type of students that are to be developed, their needs, and emotions on how they are affected by the reality with which they are faced. However, my contestation is that the cognitive aspect of curriculum serves an important role in preparing students to become critical and analytical thinkers who can be able to contribute towards policy debates, planning, and the correction of some of the errors that slacken the

## CHAPTER 4

progress of the society, should not be neglected. Therefore the status of theoretical knowledge in the curriculum must not be lost in the curriculum during the process of diversifying to make it relevant to the context. In the eyes of Giroux (2016) curriculum needs to embrace the civic, political, and moral obligations of a society. This means that society must reap the benefits of a curriculum that aligns with their aspirations in a democracy.

According to Patel (2003) graduates must integrate both cognitive and graduate attributes across disciplines because a stand-alone higher education curriculum delivery which place focuses on hard skills seems to be no longer relevant in the knowledge expansion age. Balancing disciplinary knowledge and competencies is what (Wald & Harland, 2019) refer to as knowledge pluralism whilst (Maton, 2014) refer to it as a coalition of minds that spread beyond time and space, offering theoretical knowledge a space that cannot be eroded during the process of positioning graduate attributes, technology and other knowledge types representing the mix of stakeholders. The assertion is that the integration of theoretical knowledge and graduate attributes in the curriculum content sets the stage for active learning among students, the enhancement of self-efficacy including the ability to successfully adapt to modern-day demands (Ballen *et al.*, 2017). To Römgens, Scoupe and Beausaert (2019) a graduate exemplifies competencies that do not only feature in the world of work, but in social relations with peers including moral practices that elevate productivity in the workplace and indirectly to the growth of the country. Therefore, what makes a graduate, is a conglomerate of several values, namely achievements, knowledge, skills, and personal attributes.

### **4.2.5. The workplace**

The development of strong work ethic and graduate attributes can give prospective graduates a better advantage in the workplace (Clarke,

2017). Curriculum discourses must thus focus on some of the gaps and new adaptations that need to be done to counteract some discrepancies and bridge a balance by developing students to be successful in their future career trajectory and their personal development. For instance, one of the existing gaps that most employers are pointing at includes the underdevelopment of graduate attributes which many graduates possess, but do not match the required level and expectations of employers' needs (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019). Evidence indicates that one of the contributing factors to unemployment among some graduates is the lack of essential skills needed to carry the vision and strategic goals of the employment enterprise (Epure & Barna, 2021). Arguably, the investment in graduate attributes forms part of the graduates' career success which can create leverage for better employment prospects (Charlton, 2019). Thus skills employees possess form part of the hallmark of a company or institution which can either break or put a company on the map

Patacsil and Tablatin (2017) posit that when encumberments are recruited or hired graduate attributes such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and critical thinking are sought by employers and are rated high including technical skills. Within the ambit of the WIL module students are tasked to perform certain tasks given as group activities and this can enable them to move out of their comfort zone where they use technology and apply graduate attributes, knowledge, and inherent qualities during their engagement with their peers. What has been established by Vanitha and Jaganathan (2019) is the idea that graduates who developed their graduate attributes during curriculum delivery can cope with pressure, collaborate with others, and can also handle both criticism and conflict. In most cases, higher education is often blamed for not equipping students with the relevant skills that are to be used in the changing 21<sup>st</sup> century (Hurrell, 2016).

## CHAPTER 4

Hlavackova, Lench and Brezina (2016) found that the employability of an individual is the capacity to adapt to professional demands and the current dynamics of new labour markets. Thus graduates who are entering the workplace use disciplinary knowledge and graduate attributes with which the curriculum has capacitated them. Amongst other attributes they are measured against, is their ability to work effectively with others and how they contribute to productivity which adds value to the knowledge economy and the socio-economic situation of the country (Majid, Hussin, Norman & Kasavan, 2020). Consequently, many nations globally are emphasising skill development to prepare graduates for the world of work as per the skill requisite demanded by employers (Abelha, Fernandes, Mesquita, Seabra & Oliveira, 2020). This means that professional qualifications alone are not enough in the workplace, graduate attributes are also required because of the increasing need for employment skills and technology to keep pace with global market competition in the everchanging trends.

Although graduate attributes are difficult to measure (Majid, Eapen, Aung & Oo, 2019) assert that the workplace needs both graduate attributes and hard skills. The implication is that the desired status of enhancing the socio-economic aspects of a society can be bleak if some changes are not initiated in the curriculum delivery placing value on both graduate attributes and hard skills. Other than that, the curriculum needs to equip students with organisational enterprise skills to enable students to also follow the entrepreneurship journey and become job creators instead of increasing the number of job hunters (Okoye, 2017).

The assertion presented by (Tynajala, Heikkinen & Kallio, 2022) is that employees' theoretical knowledge embedded in professional qualifications is critical but that alone is not sufficient if it is not complimented by graduate attributes. This suggests that in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world, institutional capacity's ability to innovate relies on a set

of diverse skills offered in the curriculum. Vasanthakumari (2019) posits that both cognitive abilities and graduate attributes are the hallmarks of professionals who can synthesise information, interpret and analyse information, communicate findings, and innovate, using critical and lateral thinking skills. Such a merge therefore means that there is a need for curriculum revitalisation to accommodate activities that would enable students to use both cognitive abilities and competencies. Also implied is the need to merge cognitive and graduate attributes to enable leaders in higher positions to be able to communicate organisational vision and goals.

#### **4.2.6. A General Grouping of Graduate Attributes**

Kashami and Curi (2023) indicate that graduate attributes grids may vary but they have common elements that classify them as skills relating to social, methodological, and personal attributes. The assertion is that professional skills are not the only skills needed for employment purposes but are needed for civic engagement and personal growth (Qizi, 2020). Some of the graduate attributes are thus subsequently explained:

##### **Communication Skills:**

Communication skills include dialogue and strategic communication such as public speaking, contributing some inputs in meetings, conveying, transferring, receiving information, sharing ideas and feelings, and communicating to solve problems (Shirazi *et al.*, 2014). Communication also applies in different social contexts: it can be done orally and in a written form, interpersonally or electronically. Also, information Technology (IT) has become incredibly important as a significant part of communication which brought other changes of written communication that can be done, via emails, chats, or social network comments, presentation skills, negotiation skills, and client

## CHAPTER 4

communication, including active listening, which are skills that are highly demanded by employers (Ibid).

### **Complex Problem Solving:**

Complex Problem Solving involves the ability to think in different ways by weighing different options various options and viewing a problem from different angles to find the most suitable answer. It involves thinking and applying knowledge in complex situations and is used more during critical situations. It can be applied in the workplace, in society to solve conflict, and in various contexts (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017).

### **Teamwork:**

Teamwork includes collaboration and putting heads together in small groups towards achieving a common goal. Collaborative working helps to generate ideas that assist organisations in identifying and solving problems effectively as well as creating relationships that boost individuals' confidence (Khalid *et al.*, 2021).

### **Leadership Skills:**

Leadership can be described as the ability to influence decisions and motivate others in the organisation (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020). According to (Kissi *et al.*, 2019) leadership skills are mostly valued in organizations as a citizenship behaviour that steers those that are led toward positive outcomes and are essential for the continued viability of an organization. It thus includes a display of intrapersonal skills of complex soft skills combined with logic and self-management skills (Ibid). In a social context leadership aims at enhancing engagement, empowerment, and participation to bring together diverse contributions and inputs to steer the organisation towards the right path in line with policy implementation by facilitating the correct behaviour whilst sustaining standard citizen behaviour (de Geus *et al.*, 2020). Leadership is an applicable and sought-after competency that

determines productivity and progress both at the workplace and in social contexts through a display of sound behavioural traits (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020).

**Analytical and Critical Thinking skills:**

Personal skills indicating how individuals plan and achieve their goals resemble cognitive skills, such as knowledge and thinking skills (Engelberg, 2015). Ability to analyse information and use logic to address the issues, identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions or approaches to problems, and assess performance to make improvements or take corrective action (Ibid). It also includes coping with ambiguity/ uncertainty, the ability to handle personal and work-related problems in overly complex, dynamic environments or unclear information, pressure, stress, criticism, setbacks, and personal and work-related problems (Ibid).

As stated by Setiawati and Corebima (2017), critical thinking skills are not inherited but need to be learned and are used to examine, analyses, interpret, and evaluate (Hidayah *et al.*, 2017). The same opinion by Karim and Normaya (2015) that the ability to think critically is particularly important to have, because having the ability to think critically can help us think rationally in solving problems and looking for and developing alternative solutions to these problems. Thus critical thinking skills can assist students in acquiring knowledge and attitudes which are key components of the curriculum.

**Creativity and Innovation:**

It is perceived as the ability to view a problem in different creative ways by stretching one's imagination and thinking to generate new ideas (Malik, 2019). Innovation skills play a significant role in the age of technology and knowledge expansion to produce models and innovate new things that can be beneficial to consumers, and it is mostly valued



## CHAPTER 4

by companies as a competitive advantage in companies to improve their products (Ibid); thus needed for graduate readiness. Creativity further contributes to helping leaders and managers to use analytical and intuitive thinking to keep their organisation on the go through discoveries that are made using technology to access information (Bawa, 2014). This needs graduates who seek employment to possess such attributes to solve problems.

### **Lifelong Learning Skills:**

Lifelong Learning Skills refers to a combination of skills that provides a path for individual development and may include the following skills: Self-Awareness, initiative, flexibility, responsibility, persistence, eagerness, goal-oriented, and motivation (Robles, 2012). The 21<sup>st</sup>-century world of changes demands employees who are eager to learn new things to keep the company abreast of new knowledge and technologies that can contribute to productivity and progress. There is a need for graduates to adapt to changes, to be flexible, focused, and committed to directing the organisation towards the realisation of its short- and long-term goals, therefore companies recruit graduates who possess such competencies to contribute to the development of the organisation (Ibid).

### **Value orientation:**

Robles (2012) emphasises the maintenance of ethical behaviour, a display of values, and certain work ethics which involve respect, trust, responsibility, and honesty in dealing with clients and other employees including how the organisation's resources are used. Hence such competencies are expected from graduates who enter the labour market.

**Organisational/Managerial skills:**

The term organisational/Managerial skills refers to the ability to take initiative and the capacity to manage one's time, manage goals independently, plan, produce with others, and identify the best people for the job (Robles, 2012). It is a skill that is needed by the workplace for effective and efficient use of time and to produce or complete work according to certain expectations are some of the competencies that employers look for when recruiting employees (Ibid).

**Emotional Intelligence (EI):**

It is also another related skill with a sociological lineage whilst at the same time is linked to performance and encompassing several personality traits, namely social graces, personal habits, and optimism that compliment hard skills (Kingsley, 2015). People possessing emotional intelligence skills establish meaningful relationships that enable the expression of emotions and management thereof, they turn out to be better listeners, leaders, and decision-makers (Ibid). In the changing and fluid world balance between emotions and logic is needed to calm individuals to make informed decisions and solve problems by balancing emotions with reasoning skills (Ibid). Aided by critical inquiry individuals are enriched with personal research knowledge and skills that are regarded as key graduate attributes. This means it makes an individual develop competencies that enable one to work well with people to achieve goals, mainly being pleasant, cooperative, sensitive to others, and easy to get along with.

**Digital skills/Technology:**

The term digital skills refers to the ability to use digital media to develop productively, creatively, and critically reflect on their usage and impact on society and work (Montresor, 2016). In the digitally driven future, digital literacy is an essential requirement for individuals to effectively navigate their work, education, and daily lives including using

## CHAPTER 4

technology in a technically, economically, socially, and environmentally responsible manner (Ibid). Digital skills have become indispensable components of skillsets, requiring higher education to prepare graduates for future skills (Ibid). This means to communicate and share information technology as one of the skills needed plays a huge role in our lives and thus needs curriculum transformation to be infused appropriately.

Evidently, competencies constituting graduate attributes discussed above complement theory and contribute towards the holistic development of students in the 21st-century world.

Table 4.1 below illustrates the complex and dynamic nature of graduate attributes. According to de Vos *et al.* (2021) they do not only contribute to skills needed for employability, but they encompass social, personal, and methodological elements that constitute both subjective and objective components of personal development and socio-economic progress.

**Table 4.1: An adapted Soft-skills classification derived from Grisi (2014)**

Personal	Social	Methodological
Learning skills	Communication	Customer/User orientation
Professional Ethics	Teamwork	Continuous Improvement
Self-awareness	Contact Network	Adaptability to Changes
Tolerance to stress	Negotiation	Results orientation
Commitment	Conflict Management	Analysis Skills
Life balance	Leadership	Decision Making, Critical Thinking and Problem-solving skills
Creativity/ Innovation	Culture Adaptability	Management Skills,

Mediation	Object-oriented	Personal equilibrium
Self-Management	Personal habits	Emotional Intelligence
Teamwork	Interpersonal Skills	Productivity
Networking	Continuous Improvement	Cultural Adaptation
Self-respect	Values/Moral skills	Professional Ethics
Entrepreneurial skills	Business Acumen	Numeracy
	Research, information management and technical skills	

### 4.3 Theoretical framework

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This chapter adopts a fusion of constructivist theories with the belief that learners are not passive in the process of acquiring knowledge and graduate attributes. Piaget's (1983) is one of the dominant theories that the chapter adopts, as it highlights how learning occurs through the instruction given by the facilitator and how learners' active participation in their learning experiences exposes them to knowledge and skills. In essence, the development of graduate attributes offers hands-on experience and problem-solving mechanisms that are regarded as important schemas in Piaget's theory. The implication is that students interact with others and further learn other competencies which enables them to interpret and understand the world better. Experiences learners are exposed to are thus perceived as a support base for active engagement and exploration of the physical and social world (Lazarus, 2010).

Unavoidably, the world of work provides other learning opportunities and a hands-on experience for learners to develop more skills outside the classroom situation. Engagement and participation of the learner with the socio-cultural world is also expanded with the incorporation of other learning theories. To that effect, the curriculum requires

## CHAPTER 4

transformation to accommodate an array of different learning opportunities and to enable dynamic advancement and adaptation to 21<sup>st</sup>-century trends. In this chapter, Piaget's learning theory is integrated into Albert Bandura's (1986) socio-cognitive theory which perceives human functioning as the result of the dynamic interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors. This implies that learners can sharpen their skills and develop their traits through interaction with others and the world of work. Thus curriculum through the WIL module can support learners' cognitive, emotional, and social qualities by employing both hard and graduate attributes. The idea is further validated by Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) who define learning as a process and not a final product. Similarly, this creates a synergy of cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences and experiences that enlarge people's knowledge, skills, values, and worldviews (Ibid).

Since learning is not only viewed as a cognitive process but a process of social participation, the implication is that global trends and workplace learning can influence how people learn and build knowledge. Therefore changes in the curriculum need to become relevant, to recognise teamwork, experiential activities and partnership which are constituents of graduate attributes, including the use of technology which aligns with the constructivism theories of both Piaget (1983) and Bandura (1986). The integration can bring a dynamic contribution to personal, development, behavioural change, creativity, and environmental sustainability including a sense of creativity in the development of knowledge and skills.

### 4.4 Research design

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Since the curriculum is aimed at developing students' personal lives and career development, a literature review study was carried out to identify

features of curriculum relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on the value of graduate attributes to industries, students, and other stakeholders. The demand and need for graduate attributes in the marketplace, to complement hard skills provided the main reason for the review of the literature. The other reason is the limited investigation around the discourse of graduate attributes including the difficulty to measure them. Guided by an interpretive paradigm, data was gathered from different sources to examine the value of graduate attributes to different stakeholders. Literature was thus reviewed and analysed by the concepts and patterns that emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

## 4.5 Findings

**Table 4.2: Findings of literature review**

Theme/Concepts	Author	Year of publication
A growing interest in the value of graduate attributes in education and business	-Succi and Canovi	2020
Competencies/graduate attributes respond to socio-economic needs	-Caspersen, Frølich and Muller	2017
Curriculum based on scientific knowledge and application	-Wald and Harland	2017
Curriculum placing value on competencies to complement knowledge	- Villar-Onrubia and Rajpal	2016
Curriculum fitting into international standards	- de Wit, Gacel-Avila, Jones and Jooste	2017
Curriculum addressing various needs and logics of different stakeholders	-Annala, Lindén, and Mäkinen	2016; 2015

## CHAPTER 4

Curriculum relevance, the prime factor for curriculum transformation	-Nagarajan and Edwards	2014
Curriculum integration transcending all disciplines	-Drake and Reid	2018
Investment in human capital	-Hora <i>et al.</i> -Abenathy	2016 2018
Competencies build character	-Robes	2012
Human desirable traits contribute to the nation's success.	-Freire - Pachauri and Yadav, 2014.	1992;
- competencies enhancing the efficiency of hard skills.	Geissler, Edison and Wayland,	2012
-Some competencies are equivalent to cognitive skills	-Hora <i>et al.</i>	2016
-Graduate attributes balancing the scale - Hard and soft skills together -Balancing disciplinary knowledge and competencies	- Hora <i>et al.</i> ; Nooriah and Zakiya -Wald and Harland -Maton and Moore	2016 2015 2017 2010
-Graduate attributes are employability skills	- Patacsil and Tablatin,	2017
-Technological application preferred by students in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century	-Ballen <i>et al.</i>	2017
-Engagement in a pluralistic democracy to realise human rights principles	-Qizi; Cinque	2020; 2016
-Cognitive abilities and graduate attributes enabling synthesis of information, interpretation, and analysis using critical and lateral thinking skills.	- Vasanthakumari	2019

## 4.6 Discussion

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Global changes do influence changes in education and in the business sector; hence a growing need exists for graduate attributes to be given an important space in the curriculum (cf. Succi & Canovi, 2020) because they create better opportunities for students in the world of work and enable them to be productive to enhance companies' turnovers and the overall injection to the socio-economic growth of the country leading to the progress of a nation. Lifting the place of graduate attributes in the curriculum thus becomes a shift from the traditional curriculum approach of placing focus mainly on theoretical knowledge or factual knowledge.

As a result, the development of competencies is revealed as significant in complementing knowledge (cf. Villar-Onrubia & Rajpal, 2016). It is also within the precepts of constructivism that the development of cognitive and non-cognitive elements embraced in theory and graduate attributes are both valued for active engagement with diverse contexts, combined with personal development to enhance innovative and creative problem-solving.

Furthermore, global trends and pressure from different stakeholders and societal challenges reveal the significance of human capital which translates towards placing value on personal and social traits needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which demands the acquisition of both hard and soft skills (cf. Nooriah & Zakiya, 2015). Competencies thus are significant to enable individuals and society to cope with and address the 21<sup>st</sup>-century demand (cf. Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020) while research also highlights the prime factor for curriculum transformational curriculum relevance (cf. Nagarajan & Edward, 2014). On the other hand, the role played by graduate attributes for personal, career development, and work readiness validates the motive for curriculum transformation (cf. Ibid). In the same vein, research revealed that workplace skills are mostly



## CHAPTER 4

needed in the workplace (cf. Cimatti, 2016). Thus the 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom activities that contribute towards the development of teamwork, communication, self-management, analytical skills, and the ability to apply knowledge to solve problems are graduate attribute features that complement theories including a logical approach to problems. To that effect, the curriculum needs to be changed to place graduate attributes on a pedestal where they get to be recognised as important factors that enable the curriculum to be accommodative of different needs of different stakeholders.

It has also been indicated that a relationship between technology, graduate attributes, and hard skills also contributes to an inclusive curriculum that equips students with the necessary skills and knowledge to cope with the changing world. The objective therefore must be to develop students in different aspects inclusive of cognitive, emotional, social, and digital skills. Technology, on the other hand, has proven to play a huge role in communication and benefits individuals, companies, and the nation at large; hence technological skills are required to be integrated into the curriculum to navigate knowledge expansion and the technological divide in a web of networks (cf. Guo *et al.*, 2019). In the same breath, Barbara (2016) has indicated that technological skills are highly in demand at the workplace. Since relevancy and connectivity to the real world are of paramount importance, a combination of graduate attributes, knowledge, and technology in the curriculum demands curriculum transformation to restructure and bring together all different components of the curriculum, particularly graduate attributes in their respective dominant positions instead of putting them secondary to other knowledge types. What has also become evident in the investigation, is the idea that changes in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century curriculum are not only environmentally responsive, but they place students at the centre of learning and engage them as active participants towards achieving learning goals or outcomes. Therefore curriculum

transformation which contributes to the socio-economic success of all stakeholders involved by placing value on graduate attributes, hard skills, and technology is not only relevant, but it is ideal in the realm of global competitiveness (cf. Caspersen, Frølich & Muller, 2017).

Further revelations point to the fact that the development of graduate attributes in the curriculum are not following a silo, idealistic traditional way, but operates in synergy with the real world and is an investment in lifelong learning skills that have been internalised and remain with individuals permanently and to be used in varying situations (cf. Hora *et al.*, 2016). Research further reveals that curriculum provision in higher education is not only meant to prepare students for job employment but also to provide them with knowledge, technical expertise, and skills that can enable them to participate and make informed decisions in a pluralistic democracy to realise human rights principles such as respect for dignity, civic engagement responsibilities, ethical behaviour, and sustainability issues (cf. Hora, Benbow & Oleson, 2016).

Equally important is the discovery of a transformational curriculum approach that benefits different stakeholders. It is thus suggested that the curriculum be environmentally responsive, and culturally relevant, connecting knowledge, competencies and technology, while relational – having a relationship with society, business, and the environment. Most importantly, the Higher Education curriculum must position graduate attributes alongside theoretical knowledge. In the same breath, one of the other personal traits that attract different stakeholders has been revealed to be Emotional Intelligence, as it enables individuals to manage emotions, understand their emotions, apply them positively, and control them when confronted with difficult and changing situations. Leadership capabilities also assist graduates in navigating through conflicts and challenges.

## CHAPTER 4

While graduates are perceived as predicting individuals' success in various spheres of life (cf. Cinque, 2016), society expects graduates to be proactive, critical and engaged citizens who can perform leadership roles, exemplify sound behaviour, including the ability to analyse and solve problems (cf. Bawa, 2014). Thus integration in a curriculum which represents different knowledge types makes curriculum not only relevant but to cut across disciplines focusing on the transmission of theoretical knowledge, skills and technology beneficial to building students' character through cognitive and non-cognitive skills that enable graduates to use knowledge and skills to navigate and cope with diversified complex problems in their personal space, the world of work as well as becoming responsible citizens. Also, the application of social skills such as communication, problem-solving, decision-making, networking skills, and the use of technology enables one's interaction with a diverse host of people. The discussion thus elevates the significance of an integrated curriculum.

### 4.7 Conclusion

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Considering the findings, this chapter concludes that a shift of perception in valuing graduate attributes as complex and important competencies in the current changing times demands curriculum transformation. It can also be concluded that a transformed curriculum in Higher Education equally positions and values both content knowledge and graduates' attributes to produce graduates who not only play a part in the labour market but can fit in different real-life contexts through a display of professional behaviour and a balanced development of both cognitive and non-cognitive capabilities. Active participation in socio-economic or civil matters as a sign of responsible citizenry or the ability for self-employment denotes graduates who are products of a transformed curriculum. The findings opposed the idea

that non-cognitive skills are simple and require less attention, adding to the conclusion that cognitive and non-cognitive skills are equally important and complement one another. The findings validate the conclusion that new developments in how students learn, and how they access information require a transformed curriculum.

The conclusion drawn from the findings is the idea that by educating and developing students for job readiness, and personal development, socially engaged individuals can take responsible roles in the society where they live in sync with the transformational agenda. It can also be concluded that a transformed curriculum that integrates graduate attributes, hard skills, and technology achieves different aims and appeals to different stakeholders. Hence there is a greater need to produce students who can interpret and analyse knowledge and at the same time, can innovate, solve problems, think critically, and collaborate with others, which all are all graduate attribute principles needed for an all-rounded citizen, who is productive at the workplace and can cope with different challenges in the world.

The implication for a transformed curriculum is the value of embracing and integrating multiple knowledge types as a balanced approach that addresses different stakeholders' needs. To that effect, curriculum transformation requires adaptation to current trends, and socio-economic and political nuances that are of value to both society and the marketplace. The development of graduate attributes in synergy with theory and technology is the creation of innovative solutions enabling society to solve problems using technology. The integration of technology in the curriculum also makes learning flexible and is valued in opening links with other nations to massify learning, benchmark, and get exposure to other nations' standards, values, and work ethics to contribute to the progress and sustainability of the nation. Neglecting the role played by technology in the curriculum and depriving graduates

## CHAPTER 4

of technological skills has implications for companies; they recruit employees from foreign countries instead of using local people, and these further impact the socio-economic progress of the country negatively and increase the number of unemployable graduates.

The implication of human philosophical approaches such as constructivism and cultural capital theories is their significance in placing learners' activism at the centre of the curriculum and considering how they learn including the relevancy of the curriculum in consideration of their needs. Thus the development of competencies has implications for learners to be able to fit well in different settings and to build personal traits and attitudes to complement knowledge that has been gathered which enable graduates to participate in the prevailing socio-economic, cultural, and political state of their country. Lastly, the other conclusion drawn from the findings is that an integrated curriculum model that develops and benefits graduates from various angles covers the Know, Be, and Do and is suggested as the best approach to produce an integrated multi-dimensional curriculum. Such a transformed curriculum places focus on knowledge as well as on the building of sound character traits of graduates who are active, critical, and engaged citizens, who can apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired in any given situation. The recommendation for further research is on how best facilitators can be trained effectively in integrating and assessing graduate attributes alongside theoretical knowledge.

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## CHAPTER 5

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# Rethinking support for university teachers in the context of a decolonising higher education: the role of academic developers

*Emmanuel M Mgqwashu*

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### Abstract

In this chapter, the diverse histories of formerly different universities that were merged into one is the focus of this study. It illustrates how academic developers' (ADs) commitment post the merger to continuously re-think strategies to effectively offer responsive academic development support to students and academic staff continues to produce good results. Tasked with a mandate to render academic development support to academic staff, postgraduate, as well as undergraduate students to achieve equity of outcomes, ADs continue to re-think the strategy and approach in fulfilling their mandate. The chapter draws from New Literacy Studies (NLS) as the theoretical lens to advance its argument for the critical role ADs play to professionalise academics as university teachers.

**Keywords:** decoloniality, academic development, academic support, New Literacy Studies

## 5.1 Introduction

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Since universities are institutions that offer formal education, one of their major tasks is to develop students' cognitive abilities. Kembo (2000:289) defines these abilities as students' "...memory, their ability to generalise, to grasp relationships such as cause and effect, to predict the consequences of events, to grasp the essential message of a speech or a book, and to evaluate situations." Kembo (2000:289) further points out that formal education is meant to develop affective skills, by which she means: "...attitudes to work and study...tolerance for people who may differ... [in view] ... learners' social skills...their ability to work together with other people, to communicate with them, and to support those who need assistance". Taking Kembo's explications into consideration, this chapter presents an argument that, unless teaching approaches and practices in the university are carefully and deliberately planned such that they successfully inculcate and enhance the above skills in students, universities will be bound to fail. This will be a failure not only for the graduate but also for society and the various professional occupations more broadly. Thus a deliberate investigation into university teaching practices accompanied by academic staff development is necessary. Conferring degrees should mean, as Nyerere (1995:5) puts it, that we have educated able students: "to produce logical thinking based on facts, to explain the thought processes and the logic, and to respond to the intellectual challenge of an opposing argument – whether this comes from within or outside their ranks."

These are the skills our ever-evolving society desperately needs. To develop all these skills, I want to argue, requires a sophisticated and deeper knowledge and understanding by academics of the nature of the disciplines they teach and research in, and how teaching practices are shaped by the nature of the knowledge they teach, and what counts as valid ways to transmit it. In a society that sells and buys everything in

exchange for the general equivalence, it is easy for disciplinarity to be lost as disciplinary experts are frantically attempting to respond to the criterion of economic usefulness that tends to influence the acceptance, and therefore success, of any course introduced within the context of tertiary education. Indeed, the context in which we are slowly but surely undergoing an imposition of the “hegemony of instrumental reason” (Blake *et al.*, 1998:3), these are legitimate concerns. Educational authorities and market forces continue to exert pressure on higher education teachers in ways that pose a threat to formative degrees.

This is because disciplines in such degrees are interested, among other things, in the institutional and social importance of ‘non-marketable knowledge’. ‘Non-marketable’ not in the sense that the skills these degrees inculcate in students do not have the material, monetary and practical use, but in the sense that they are not of immediate, vocation-specific marketability like Medicine, Accounting, and such like. The effect of this in some disciplines is, among other things, to re-model teaching in ways that will appeal to instrumentalist reason. Since university education should enable its graduate to develop skills to reflect on the condition of humanity more broadly and are concerned with the articulation of thoughts regarding how humanity experiences the world, a move towards remodelling teaching in ways that succumb to the pressure from the world of markets means the reason for the university could be compromised. For example, in writing about the Humanities as a field of study, Noyes’ (1999:214) perspective is useful in this regard. For him, the Humanities mode of knowledge production focusses on “...the articulation of difficulty is the mode of knowledge production proper to the Humanities. And it is an essential mode of knowledge production in a democratic society, a society that takes its own humanity seriously.” Blake *et al.* (1998:4) understand this role as “the transformation of individuals and of their understanding of their



## CHAPTER 5

world [and]”, and he goes further, “the role is being pushed one side, if not abolished...”

Within this environment, the articulation of difficulty [as] a mode of knowledge production should guide and shape the choices university teachers make as regards teaching approaches. In other words, students’ loyalty to a tradition of enquiry needs to be fostered through teaching practices so that courses can sustain such a tradition. This is the kind of commitment that is at the heart of academic endeavour and is fundamental in higher education values that are quickly marginalised due to globalised economic ethos. It is for this reason that the Scholarship in Higher Education (HE) teaching and learning, particularly in decolonising contexts such as South Africa (SA), constantly emphasises the need for academics as university teachers to engage in a continual and systematic inquiry into student learning (Mgqwashu *et al.*, 2020; Vandeyar, 2020; Leibowitz, 2017)”. This is more urgent in a decolonising higher education context where diverse groups of students, the majority of whom literature (Timmis *et al.*, 2021) describe as non-traditional, have already raised a concern during the 2015 #Rhodes Must Fall student protests.

Regarding what students had to say during these protests, Shay (2016:3) reminds us that many curricula “are taught in oppressive classrooms by academics who are demeaning, unprofessional and use their power in ways that discriminate unfairly against students”. Amongst other things, this confirms the fact that as university teachers, academics are not just “...conduits of the curriculum. They are complex beings constituted amongst other things of an identity, value systems, beliefs and lived experiences – all of which inform their practice within particular contexts” (Vandeyar, 2020:784).

It is these identity issues within the academy that make the role of academic developers (ADs) strategic and critical in transforming and

decolonising learning and teaching learning spaces. The professional development opportunities they are tasked to set up are designed to foster a culture of critical reflexivity on the part of university teachers with regard to the extent to which their identities enable and/or constrain student learning. In this chapter, academic development (AD) is understood as an area of practice and research in higher education that intends to create “conditions supportive of teaching and learning, in the broadest sense” (Leibowitz, 2014:359) to “help create learning environments that enhance educational quality” (Pleschová *et al.*, 2012:9). As academics are appointed *primarily* based on their disciplinary knowledge, disciplinary expertise, and research, with teaching and learning receiving *a secondary emphasis*, the contribution by ADs to the academic project cannot be over-emphasised. Writing on what he calls the ‘mystique of merit’ used for academic staff appointments, Thornton (2013:129) points out that:

*Faith in the idea of an unequivocal ‘best person’ arises from the belief that merit is a neutral and apolitical variable...The objective element comprises a candidate’s qualifications, employment history, grants, publications, teaching areas [my emphasis], PhD completions, etc - the type of information appearing on an academic’s CV - but a literal approach makes no sense without interpretation. From which institution were the qualifications obtained? What is the standing of that institution? Is the candidate’s work history relevant? Are the publications refereed? What is the standing of the journals in which they appear or, in the case of books, the publishing houses that published them? How significant is the body of research? How original and creative is it? What impact has the candidate’s scholarship had? And so on.*

As evidenced in Thornton’s (2013) words above, academic appointments appear not to treat the role of academics as *teachers* with

## CHAPTER 5

the same scrutiny as research productivity. As I will attempt to show in this chapter, the role of the ADs in the context discussed is that of fostering synergies between academics' disciplinary knowledge and their development as university teachers, an idea van Dijk (2022) and her colleagues develop well in their *Connecting academics' disciplinary knowledge to their professional development as university teachers: a conceptual analysis of teacher expertise and teacher knowledge*. In our context, employing well-designed seminars/workshops that enhance their professional responsibilities as university teachers, our context shares a commitment with the national government's framework dubbed *National-Framework-for-Enhancing-Academics-as-University-Teachers* (DHET, 2018).

This framework has at its core the improvement of the quality of university teaching, with a primary purpose to serve as a guide to the higher education system in developing and implementing strategies to enhance academics as university teachers. Hence the framework aims to promote professional development and recognition of academics as university teachers, through inter alia, more consistent and equitable access to professional development opportunities (DHET, 2018:3). All these efforts are responses to increase enrolment of students' majority from diverse ranges of demographic, socio-economic, attitudinal, and educational backgrounds. For this chapter, I focus on one of the universities that has experienced enhanced complexities brought about by the 1 January 2004 merging of three historically different institutions, which are spread across two provinces (North-West and Gauteng).

### 5.2 The research context

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This merger of universities included the former University of North-West which is located in the former Bophuthatswana Homeland and is mainly black-dominated in terms of staff and students. The second university is

the former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education located in Potchefstroom, a town formerly designated to the White Afrikaner population by the apartheid regime, and relatively dominated by Whites in terms of staff and students. The third university that was part of the merger is the Sebokeng Campus of the former Vista University, another Black populated university, in terms of staff and students. Thus staff and students of the three demographically different universities were incorporated into the North-West University (NWU). The NWU's commitment to aligning its academic programmes, qualifications and modules to ensure every student across the three campuses experiences the same educational experience, receives the same quality education and access to necessary resources for success, with a crucial role placed on Academic Development (AD) work.

The academic developer role who are placed in the Faculty Teaching and Learning Support (FTLS) directorate of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) are the focus of this chapter. FTLS is located within the CTL of the NWU. It is one of the three directorates within CTL, with Centralised Teaching and Learning Functions (CT&LF), Specialised Projects, and Research in Higher Education (SPR) as the other two directorates. Of the three directorates, FTLS's core function is that of offering a professional partnership with academic faculties in terms of Student Academic Development and Support (SADS), as well as Academic Professional Development (APD). In line with the NWU's Teaching and Learning Strategy (2021 – 2025:4), FTLS' decision to review its reason for being was so that the Team could contribute to:

- the creation of viable HE access pathways with concomitant foundational support to enhance student success;
- the NWU curriculum project (inclusive of reconceptualization of the first- and the final-year experience, expanding the nature and enhancing the quality of continuing education (short course)

## CHAPTER 5

offerings, critical cross-field outcomes across years of study, work-integrated and service-learning opportunities in preparation of community life and the world of work, and independent research development as the crown of an academic pathway);

- the strategic teaching, learning, and assessment project (inclusive of fit-for-purpose technology integration into all T-L and assessment environments (virtual, physical, and social);
- the professionalisation of higher education teaching and learning; and
- the student academic support and development strategies to enhance student retention and success.

Given the diverse histories of each of the campuses, FTLS's mandate could not be executed the same way across the three campuses *IF* our goal were to achieve equity (*not equality*) of outcomes. This is the reason the FTLS directorate appreciates the 'absence' of CTL from the list of entities within the University that are *obligated* to align their work. Memo 20 spells out in detail (amongst other things) the need for academic and some support entities to align their work across the three campuses. Contrary to the other entities, the nature of CTL's work is, by definition, hard to align. While we concede that, there are common, fundamental, and core SADS and APD needs across the three campuses *that could be aligned*, research repeatedly shows that 'support' is *always* 'situational' and inadvertently, 'contextual'. The needs of a lecturer with a responsibility to lecture in a class with 50% of the students who come from rural contexts who received schooling from the former Department of Education and Training public schooling system, for example, will be different from the type of support that could be given to a lecturer with 70% of the students coming from

former Model C or Independent Examination Board schooling backgrounds. Similarly, support for these groups of students *cannot be aligned*. Going forward, we planned to consider these nuances with faculties as we planned collectively, collaboratively, and collegially the processes and activities designed to support students and academic staff.

This is the role Academic Developers (ADs) took up. Indeed, the merger brought students with a diverse range of needs into the same learning spaces that university teachers in most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were either not prepared for /or are insufficiently equipped to respond to (Strydom *et al.*, 2017). The three HEIs and academic staff members had distinct histories and human, financial and educational resources that influenced their classroom practices. This is understandable as, before the merger, these universities separately enrolled and taught student populations that were differentially prepared for tertiary education (Pretorius, 2017). Thus, regardless of these obvious challenges and conundrums, these institutions were expected to attain the same goals. As part of the national building discourse and imperative, they needed to work together to ensure academic programmes and diverse students' experiences were aligned and were of the same quality. Academics quickly realised that the expected tasks required capacitation to build their disciplinary expertise, professionalism and responsiveness. The task included the need to keep the 'Student Voice' in mind as academics were developed. This warranted conversations around a need to embrace responsive curricula through teaching and assessment strategies that ensured equity of opportunity for success.

This challenge is not unique to South Africa. It is equally a global concern as HEIs around the world have had to respond to students with different prior learning experiences from traditional or mainstream

## CHAPTER 5

students (Timmis *et al.*, 2021) they are used to. In post-conflict, decolonising societies globally, this more diversified undergraduate student population has included first-in-family, 'non-traditional', 'historically under-represented' or 'atypical' students, descriptors that have also been applied to students from low-income households (Fry *et al.*, 2009). These students experience exclusionary university education, influenced by their economic backgrounds. In other words, teaching and learning in most HEIs tends to privilege the elite, with a limited number of students whose backgrounds and socialisation articulate the values and norms that shaped higher education. In this context, the privileged often come to university, already possessing the values and norms, practices and aptitude valued in formal learning contexts; thus making a transition from home to university a seamless experience (Mgqwashu, 2009). Due to the global unequal distribution of wealth and societal resources, students from marginalised communities experience tertiary education as alienating and a sense of non-belongingness (Mgqwashu *et al.*, 2020).

It is in this context that the role of ADs is crucial. Their contribution lies in challenging and engaging academic staff as university teachers to consider the pedagogical practices required to enable the marginalised to access the knowledge needed to navigate higher education, without alienating students from privileged backgrounds. This is particularly important in a country where a transition from an education system and policies that privilege mainstream cultures to one that is democratic and committed to equal participation is under way. By pedagogical practices, or what Bernstein (1990) calls pedagogic discourse, I mean a combination of content selection and framing, as well as teaching, pacing and assessment practices.

All these considerations resulted in the adaptation of FTLS daily operations to respond efficiently to supporting academics as university

teachers. Owing to the changes in student demographics mainly brought about through the merger, the thrust of AD work became that of drawing from the latest scholarship and research to perform the task of supporting academics as university teachers. This involved persuading academic departments to appreciate the learning and teaching implications of the merger of three historically different universities that became one university, the accompanying massification of higher education more broadly; thus the need to make explicit the ‘language’ codes of their disciplines across the curricular as daily classroom practice. In other words, the focus of AD work was to encourage university teachers to embrace pedagogic approaches that would democratise learning and their classrooms as a way to ensure all students had equal opportunity to succeed.

### **5.2.1. Selected ideas shaping FTLS ADs work**

In most decolonising contexts, there are ongoing debates on the extent to which the theoretical underpinnings that inform pedagogical choices and assessment practices in most HEIs still favour the colonial enterprise. By colonial enterprise I mean the tendencies that begin from northern research methodologies to exclude from:

*...knowledge production the formerly colonised, historically marginalized, and oppressed groups, which today are most often represented ... [by] broad categories of non-Western, third world, developing, underdeveloped, First Nations, Indigenous peoples, third world women, African American women, and so on (Chilisa, 2012:1–2).*

Leibowitz (2017) also expresses concerns about the slowness with which scholarship on theorising teaching and learning from a decolonial lens for higher education has been evolving. She notes that scholarship on theorising teaching and learning has “mainly been produced in the



## CHAPTER 5

West, and within the discourses and paradigms emanating from the West” (Leibowitz, 2017: 95).

The implications for AD work in this regard is that it ought to involve deliberateness in unsettling dominant teaching and learning discourses that are not responsive to the SA context and end with excluding the majority of students. It is the task of an AD to encourage university teachers to appreciate the fact that pedagogic discourse is “a principle by which other discourses are appropriated and brought into a special relationship with each other, for their selective transmission and acquisition” (Bernstein, 1996:47). However, if the theories that produce knowledge on teaching and learning are produced in the north, “... what would be the means for students who do not share social worlds with the world where such theory is developed, to engage with...knowledge? How would they come to know it?” (Leibowitz, 2017:96.)

Thus, through referring to a specific context in which a strategic re-thinking of the approach to support the academic project occurred, this chapter suggests a possible role ADs could play to ensure student diversity and campus histories of the three merged universities can be turned into an opportunity rather than the problem. This is the reason this chapter discusses the rationale for the decisions that informed the re-thinking of the strategy to professionalise academics as university teachers in a merged university. Since NWU committed itself to aligning its academic programmes, qualifications and modules, the change of strategy discussed in this chapter was necessary, for it reflected a commitment to capacitate university teachers in ways that will enable them to be responsive in their curricular development, pedagogies, as well as assessment. This is crucial so that every student from across the three campuses undergoes the same educational experience and receives the same quality education to ensure educational success.

### **5.2.2. Theoretical lens to understanding the phenomenon**

The chapter proposes New Literacy Studies as the overarching theoretical lens through which the re-think of the strategy for AD work was conceptualised. Gee (1990, 1998), one of the founders of the New Literacy Studies group, has contributed to a theory of literacy-as-social-practice through theorising the notion of Discourse. Gee (1990:143) defines Discourse as: "...a socially accepted association among ways of using language, thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network' or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'." Gee's (1990) definition of literacy is equally pertinent in the way the work reported in this chapter is conceptualised. For him, literacy means 'mastery or fluent control over a secondary discourse' (Gee, 1990:153). Both may be said to present Discourse and literacy as encompassing more than language or literacies, to include not only ways of speaking, reading, and writing within particular contexts but also ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking and believing, that is acceptable within specific groups of people in particular contexts. This understanding offered the ADs team the necessary tools needed to professionalise and capacitate academic staff as university teachers, and to see teaching in the university as an attempt to induct students into specific disciplinary identities. Indeed, according to Gee (in Boughey & McKenna, 2016), a discourse therefore encapsulates a socially recognisable identity and a way of being in the world. As university teachers, academics were enabled by ADs to understand that students acquire ways of being through exposure to the discipline-specific spaces in which they have enrolled. That is why the socio-cultural backgrounds of students either enhance or inhibit success in HEIs. To present the rationale for the shift in the ways ADs previously enacted their roles, and how and why the strategic approach in this work was affected, this

## CHAPTER 5

chapter draws upon three core theoretical constructs emanating from Gee's (2003) work, namely 'semiotic domains', 'affinity groups' and 'design grammars.

Semiotic domains are contexts characterised by groups that hold distinctive social practices, with content that is constantly changed and negotiated among participants. In many respects, different academic disciplines in which students are enrolled typify semiotic domains. People in disciplines possess very particular meaning-making mechanisms which manifest through interactions through words, sounds, gestures, and images. These are not static objects defined as a body of unchanging content knowledge, but always evolving as new knowledge pushes the boundaries of what is currently known. Strongly associated with the notion of semiotic domains is the notion of affinity groups. This is a group of people who share semiotic domains and among whom familiar knowledge, skills, tools, and resources are distributed and utilised in ways that are valued and accepted within a group. They thus share sets of practices, goals, values, and norms associated with the semiotic domain. Members of each of these groups can also be referred to as 'insiders' (Mgqwashu, 2011). Mastering a semiotic domain can thus be said to involve joining an affinity group as an apprentice. For this reason, academic disciplines are semiotic domains into which students are supposed to be apprenticed by affinity groups within them; the academics who are members or 'insiders'. It is here where the apprenticing of students through a deliberate, inclusive pedagogical approach is crucial.

This pedagogical approach is realised through scaffolding students' learning within a semiotic domain into discipline-specific design grammars. Gee (2003) asserts that every semiotic domain has a design grammar. In simple terms, a design grammar is a set of principles or patterns through which linguistic materials and practices in the domain

are combined to communicate subject-specific meanings. Gee (2003) further distinguishes between the ‘internal design grammar’: ways in which the content of the semiotic domain is presented, and the ‘external design grammar’: the on-going social practices that determine the principles and patterns through which the semiotic domain communicates meanings. Thus, for academic access and success to be a reality, students need to learn how to participate successfully in an affinity group and master the design grammar of the semiotic domain.

A pedagogical approach that is informed by this theorisation has a decolonising potential. This is because colonial pedagogies tend to be opaque to the majority of students. After all, they pre-suppose cognitive abilities and worldviews about students without verifying their existence. Yet, it is towards these very tendencies to which curricular choices, pedagogy and assessment are biased. These pedagogies tend to ‘speak’ to and favour the elite and marginalise the majority of students who have since become a critical part of HEIs due to the long overdue massification of higher education that occurred in the early 1990s in SA (Mgqwashu, 2009). Decolonial pedagogies, on the other hand, make explicit the invisible meta-linguistic traditions that have been shaping disciplinary discourses for centuries, as well as draw from (or at least point students to) different and/or alternative knowledge traditions to enhance access to thinking and speaking habits of the affinity group into which students are inducted. This is because decolonial pedagogues take seriously the fact that the world is certainly larger than Europe and America, and therefore cannot confine the next generation of knowledge producers to northern hemisphere epistemologies only.

### **5.2.3. Limitations to an AD’s role**

One of the opportunities that NWU’s CTL has compared to similar centres in other merged SA universities, is that it is supposed to support

## CHAPTER 5

academics and students within an overly complex university. First, its two biggest campuses, Mahikeng and Potchefstroom, are 201 km apart. The distance between Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark is 276.4 km, and between Potchefstroom and Vanderbijlpark campuses, the distance is 76.3 km. To add to this, academic programmes, qualifications and modules are aligned, with the delivery of the same content occurring in all three campuses, sometimes synchronously and online by the same academic staff to students across the three sites, occasionally face-to-face in one campus at a time, and sometimes asynchronously via online recorded videos. With a population of 44,139 (Black: 30,387; White: 11,664; Coloured: 1,574; Asian: 474; Other: 40) students in 2022 (NWU, 2023), and the fact that before the merger each campus was an independent university with its academic programmes, the AD's role required continuous serious strategic rethinking.

While these complications may be viewed as a challenge, they presented the FTLS directorate, in the CTL an opportunity to re-think its daily operations, re-strategize its approach to supporting the academic project, and seriously consider an alternative approach to establish the motivation for offering the type of support, to whom, when and how. These reconsiderations emerged out of the recognition of the real and urgent need to be responsive to the exigencies brought by the merger. In the process, there was recognition of the lack and/or in some cases absence of a scientifically grounded database on which support to university teachers and students was needed and rendered. Most of the work was generated through faculty-specific requests, as well as from the directive by senior management (often from the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Teaching and Learning). From the FTLS side, there seemed to be no research-driven, evidence-based and latest scholarship-led initiatives that informed daily work. Through the help of eight CTL Faculty Leads, who were assigned to each faculty and had a team of ten members or more under them, faculty requests reached the FTLS team.

These requests seemed to be the major motivation for engaging with academic staff as well as with students.

Given the specificity of the challenges owing to the different demographics and histories of both our students and staff at all three campuses, the CTL Faculty Teams Model and its effectiveness in supporting students and academic staff across the three campuses proved to be largely compromised. Having a CTL Faculty Lead stationed at one campus to look after a faculty which has academic staff members and students who are located across the three campuses was a significant reason for the *appearance* of the limited impact and effectiveness of the Model. At best, CTL faculty leads also seemed to have been doing more work themselves than members within their teams of ten or more staff members. In turn, this work by a Team Lead tended to concentrate mainly on the campuses where the Team Lead was located, leaving academics at other campuses less 'attended to' and essentially, fragmenting the FTLS directorate in terms of the support it is meant to offer to all faculty academic staff and students.

The other aspect that seemed to have undermined the CTL Faculty Teams Model was the principle guiding membership. While it is impossible to have expertise, qualifications and experience as the only requirements for colleagues to join a specific CTL Faculty Team, it seemed part of the reason a Team Lead accepted more responsibility than they had to take, had to do with the limited knowledge of the faculty they were assigned to and disciplines in it. In cases where a CTL Faculty Team Lead and/or some of the members qualified the same faculty, healthy working relationships with academics in that faculty were noticeable. These concerns necessitated an urgent need to address the way FTLS worked. There was certainly a commitment to strengthen the work of the CTL Faculty Teams Model, yet without compromising the specific needs of each campus. To realise this, a re-

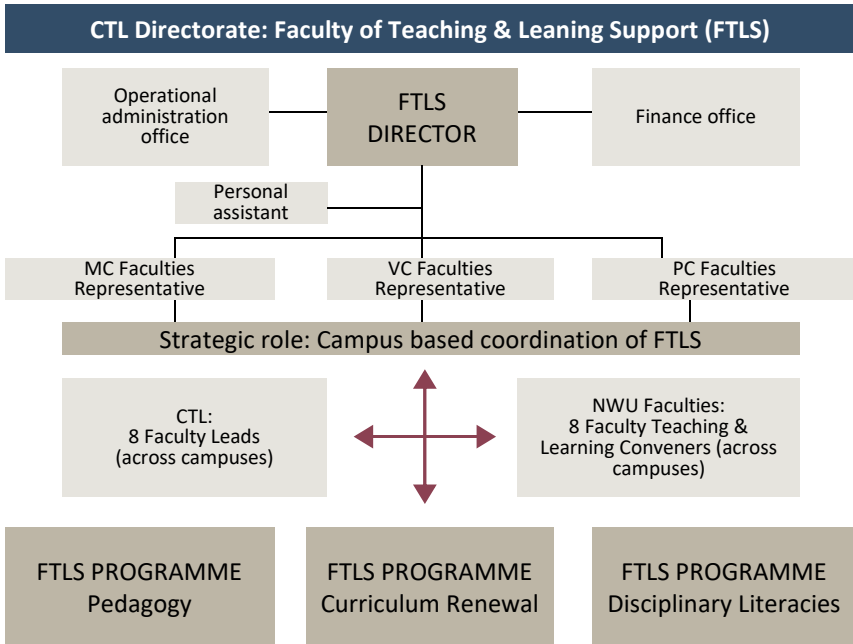
## CHAPTER 5

look at the FTLS team distribution and structure was the first response. It is in this regard that New Literacy Studies was helpful.

To respond to these concerns, the latest scholarship and research were reliant on the field of higher education studies more broadly, and the concepts discussed earlier from New Literacy Studies. More specifically, to engage with faculties at Teaching and Learning Committee meetings, FTLS drew from Gee's (2003) 'semiotic domains', 'affinity groups' and 'design grammars' to agitate for a need to revisit pedagogic practices, assessment and curricular design and development. These engagements gave rise to the development of healthy and collegial spaces for critical dialogue with academic staff, first at School levels, and then at subject group levels. Senior faculty leadership gave FTLS opportunities to present various scenarios that compromised AD work within the faculties.

### **5.2.4. Re-thinking an Academic Development support strategy**

Under the FTLS leadership, fellow CTL directors from the other two directorates were invited to engage in deliberations that occurred between FTLS and the eight faculties. The FTLS leadership was committed to ensuring that, contrary to the CTL Faculty Teams Model, the new approach to supporting the academic project by ADs needed to enable all FTLS members of staff to support all 8 faculties, without being confined to one faculty. After receiving support from fellow directors within CTL to present '*a revised strategy*' that was to support the academic project in ways that were designed to address all the obstacles revealed by preliminary findings about the CTL Faculty Teams Model, a revised FTLS team distribution and structure across the three campuses was developed. Figure 5.1 is a representation of how the team was revised:



**Figure 5.1: Revised team distribution and structure**

To realise its goals, the team was changed from having one Faculty Lead per campus (with ten or more team members under them), to identifying a Campus Representative per teaching site. These three representatives, one per campus, had a responsibility to coordinate campus-based faculty requests from all eight faculties. This did not take away the Faculty Lead role. What it did, however, is that it enabled FTLS to extend its footprint in each faculty by having one person coordinate the list of all campus-based faculty needs, a task a Faculty Lead would not add to their already large workload. In addition to this, FTLS negotiated with faculties to create a Faculty Teaching and Learning Convener role. This role enabled FTLS to have a contact point within faculties, someone who assembled all faculty academic development support needs to pass them on to a Campus Representative. These decisions were made to create a smooth work relationship between

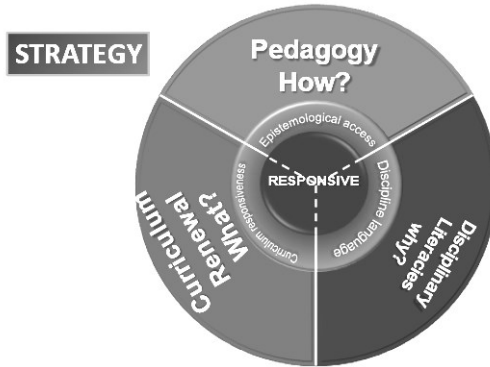


## CHAPTER 5

faculties and FTLS and to ensure someone was tracing and recording progress on the support rendered by FTLS. To ensure academic leadership and that the new strategy was research-led, scholarly informed and responsive to the unique character of NWU, a further creation of three sets of teams was undertaken. Unlike the other teams which were designed for operation reasons, these particular teams were to become communities of practice that were to immerse themselves into current thinking on higher education Academic Developer role scholarship.

To realise the objective of being scholarly in our approach to supporting the academic project, we drew from Gee's concepts: 'semiotic domains', 'affinity groups' and 'design grammars' to set up three community of practice programmes, with each assigned 12 – 15 staff members. The name of each community of practice programme was aligned to Bernstein's (1975) pedagogical theory on formal educational knowledge, and how it is realised. For Bernstein (1975), formal education knowledge can be realised through *curriculum*, *pedagogy*, and *evaluation*. FTLS derived the names of the three programmes from this Bernsteinian formulation and gave each programme a name: *Pedagogy*, *Curriculum Renewal*, and *Disciplinary Literacies*.

Figure 5.2 below depicts the academic focus of each of the three-programme teams:



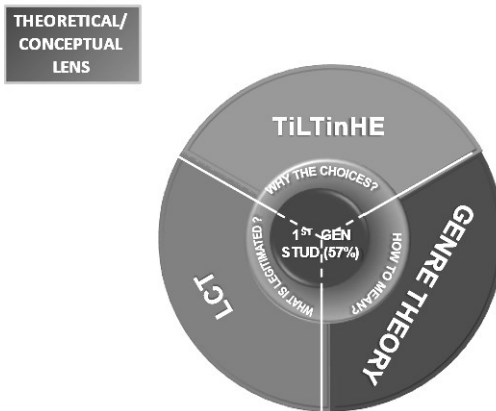
**Figure 5.2: Revised Strategy: 3 FTLS Programmes**

To ensure cross-campus coordination of scholarly engagement with the latest thinking in each of the three areas, the leadership of each programme came from all staff across the three campuses. One from the MC and one from the VC was responsible for leading *Pedagogy*, one from the PC and one from the MC were responsible for leading *Disciplinary Literacies*, and one from the MC and one from the PC were responsible for leading *Curriculum Renewal*. Since the main task was to support the academic project, it was necessary to ensure conceptual coherence in the team’s approach to supporting academic staff and students in all faculties. To achieve this conceptual coherence within and across programmes, a specific theoretical lens that aligns with each concept from Gee’s (2003) work was identified. We selected *Transparency in Learning and Teaching* (TiLT) for Pedagogy (aligns with ‘affinity groups’), *Legitimation Code Theory* (LCT) for Curriculum Renewal (aligns with ‘semiotic domains’), and *Genre Theory* (GT) for Disciplinary Literacies (aligns with ‘design grammars’).

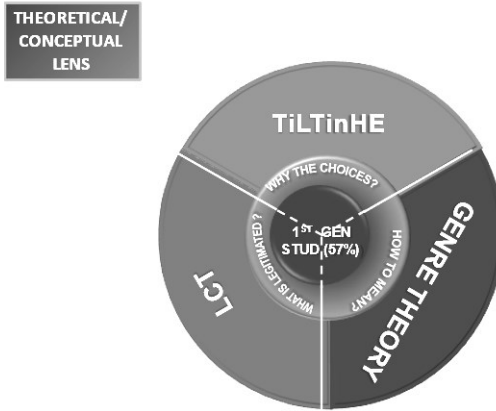
Put simply, TiLT is a learning and teaching framework that employs a set of teaching strategies with a focus on making transparent to students how and why they are learning and engaging with course content in

## CHAPTER 5

particular ways. LCT is a framework for understanding and changing knowledge practices in different areas of social life. It allows people to explore the 'rules of the game' in different fields and then develop ways of teaching more people to succeed, or to change those rules. GT, on the other hand, is a collective term used to describe theoretical approaches that are concerned with how similar situations generate typified responses called genres, which serve as a platform for both creating an understanding based on shared expectations and also for shaping the social context. While TiLT was helping the team to capacitate academic staff with skills to make explicit to students why certain choices were made during learning events, LCT gave the team tools to empower academics to be transparent about what counts as knowledge in their chosen fields, and GT was drawn upon by the team to capacitate academics in helping students learn how to mean within their disciplines.



**Figure 5.3 illustrates these conceptual choices that enabled the FTLS team to execute its tasks:**

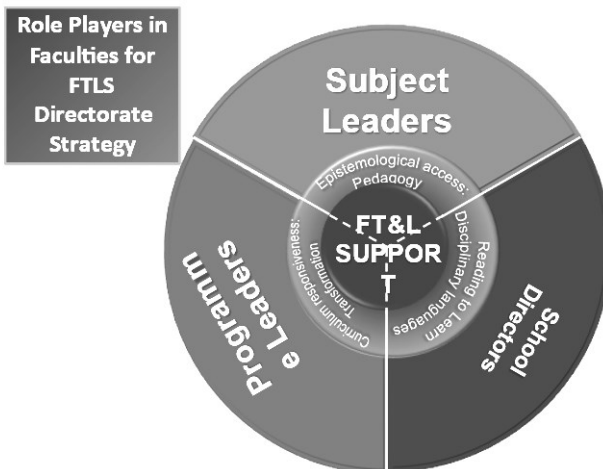


**Figure 5.3: FTLS conceptual lenses to support the academic project**

Finally, to ensure each member within each Programme was sufficiently capacitated to develop a working knowledge of each theoretical lens and to carry out their tasks within their Programme from a scholarly perspective, but also to create an awareness of how each Programme constructed itself from a scholarship point of view, a series of three workshops on TiLT, LCT and GT were organised. While each FTLS team member was assigned to a specific Programme, everyone was invited to a 3-day workshop at which the theoretical and conceptual ideas upon which each Programme drew were elaborated. This was a strategy to ensure each FTLS staff member carried out their tasks on an informed basis and with confidence and dignity. In addition to this workshop, each Programme had to hold fortnightly *Reading Sessions* on relevant latest literature related to the theoretical lens and concepts (TiLT, LCT, GT) they needed to draw upon as they supported teaching (academic staff development) and learning (student support) in faculties. This ensured that not only a Coordinator on a campus was confident to support academic staff and students in a faculty, but each member could also do so with great skill and confidence.

## CHAPTER 5

This approach proved effective as it ensured that every member acquired the necessary ‘theoretical working understanding’ about what they needed to do and how to execute their tasks from a theoretical base. As they attended to academic staff or students’ needs across disciplinary areas, the latest thinking and scholarship on Academic Development continued to be the resource from which to draw. What this did for FTLS as well was that it ‘broke the wall of separation’ between Academic Developers and Student Advisors. This is because the theories selected offer ideas and practical strategies for both student support and academic staff development in their role as university teachers. Thus any member of the Programme could now be called upon to support teaching and learning in any faculty and all campuses, and students or academic staff alike. As a strategic meeting point, it was prudent to identify entry points into faculties. The custodians of the academic project within faculties were such points of entry, as illustrated in Figure 5.4.



**Figure 5.4: Strategic entry points into faculties**

As middle-management roles, School directors oversee the disciplinary cognateness and affinity in ways that facilitate a School's academic identity, Programme leaders need to quality assure the academic integrity of the Programme as far as module and course combinations are concerned, and Subject leaders have a task to oversee the extent to which pedagogic practices 'enabled learning' and academic success for all students. This understanding of the role of each role-player within faculties empowered the FTLS team to understand how to engage with each of the faculty members.

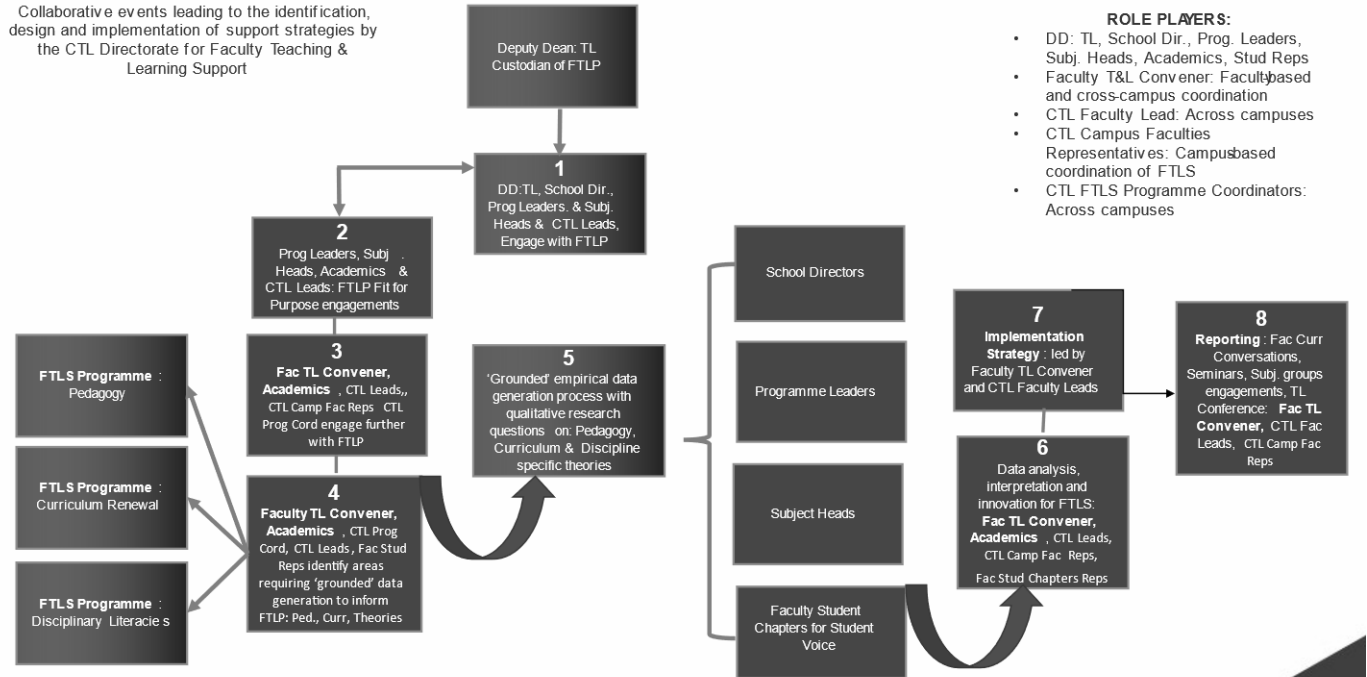
To further strengthen this scientific and scholarly approach to supporting the academic project, FTLS decided to add the generation of baseline data based on which the FTLS teams could approach faculties. This was designed to add the reason for approaching a faculty to offer support to academic staff and students. We identified data sources to include middle managers of Schools and student representatives within faculties who are spread across the three campuses. Such data was generated and added to the already existing individual day-to-day requests from lecturers. The team was convinced that a systematic, scholarly, and triangulated approach to generating data that will inform our Student Academic Development and Support (SADS) as well as Academic Professional Development (APD) initiatives was the best option.

All these choices ensured a collaborative approach between FTLS and faculties to develop faculty support activities that needed to be planned and put in place for the duration of one-year. Decisions on *when, why, and how* we developed workshops for students and academic staff, organised seminars and/or curriculum conversations within faculties, or invited international scholars, and innovative local and international researchers in specific fields of study, were made collegially and collaboratively with faculties. **Figure 5.5** illustrates this triangulated data

## CHAPTER 5

generation system we came up with to ensure the running of consultative meetings because of which support was to be provided to faculties:

Collaborative events leading to the identification, design and implementation of support strategies by the CTL Directorate for Faculty Teaching & Learning Support



Consultative meetings for negotiated collaboration between Faculty & CTL

CTL

Figure 5.5: Consultative meetings for negotiated collaboration between faculties & CTL



## CHAPTER 5

Data that emerged from these consultative meetings were analysed, interpreted, and presented thematically for discussion at the respective faculty's Teaching & Learning Committee meetings by the FTLS teams, together with Campus-based faculty representative coordinators. Input from faculties via the faculty's Teaching and Learning Committee meetings was invited to shape further deliberations within CTL. Such deliberations took place between the FTLS director and the CTL faculty representative coordinators. Thus the nature and form that faculty interventions took were determined by grounded data generated concerning a faculty at a specific site of delivery. Where there was evidence from data that an intervention for a specific faculty needed to be aligned across the three campuses, this was done. In cases where data revealed that each campus' data suggested a different intervention or some variations of the same intervention, even though it is the same faculty, a response was developed accordingly. This is where the role of the CTL faculty representative coordinators is crucial. In collaboration with other directors within the three CTL directorates, the FTLS director offered academic leadership that eventually determined the nature of the interventions that will endeavour to be campus-, faculty- and discipline-specific.

### 5.3 A synoptic discussion of findings

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In broad terms, the findings generated through these data generation strategies revealed that developing students' awareness of the fact that, as Montgomery and Stuart (1992:7) put it: "meaning [is] a function, not of particular words or wordings, but rather of the discursive formation in which...expressions occur" was an aspect requiring urgent attention. By this I mean when language is in use (whether in writing or in speaking), discursive formation functions as a set of regulative principles

that underlie actual discourses. Within this context, meaning becomes an effect upon the human subject, but not a stable property.

What emerged was that pedagogic practices in most disciplines required further attention to ensure they landed themselves to principles underpinning reflexive pedagogy. It appears the latter is seen by most academics as too elementary and is therefore rejected because it clashes with their pedagogical philosophy that what a lecturer says is so self-explanatory that a student who fails to unpack it is not supposed to be in the university in the first place. What this philosophy ignores is the fact that learning implies acquiring both knowledge itself, and the code of transmission used to convey a particular body of knowledge. Assuming that students will understand the academic discourse, without explicitly reflecting on its constructedness, is to ignore the fact that language is not simply a collection of words but provides us with a system of transposable mental dispositions. Given the demographic changes experienced by NWU, it would be self-destructive for the academics to maintain a teaching practice that is essentially content-centred and insular, thereby ignoring making explicit the role language plays in learning and the construction of specific disciplinary constructs.

More often than not, reflexive pedagogy was seen as a practice with the potential to 'water down' the 'noble' aims of university education, instead of a practice that allows practitioners of pedagogical communication methodically and continuously to reduce to a minimum the misunderstanding arising from the use of an unfamiliar code. As ADs engaged with academic writing by students across faculties, this was evidenced by the kind of essays students produced. Most of these essays displayed poor mastery of language as students sought to reproduce the academic discourse, and thus found themselves constrained to write in a poorly understood language. Defined by their lesser knowledge of academic discourse, students could do nothing that

## CHAPTER 5

did not confirm the most pessimistic image that the lecturer, in her most professional capacity, was willing to confess to. It was a common thing to hear lecturers making comments such as “they understand nothing because they do not want to do their work”.

Ironically, while this is the kind of attitude many lecturers had toward students, the former still expected the latter to manipulate language academically. This expectation betrays a rather flawed image of students by institutions of higher learning: that students are a socially homogeneous group who differ only according to individual talent and merit. Because of this image, comprehension and manipulation of language are the first points on which students’ knowledge is judged. I argue that assessing students on such premises ignores some facts about human knowledge, and of course, about learning. Two issues were basic to AD inquiry into the nature of human knowledge: first, how language contributes to our understanding of the world, and secondly, how our beliefs about the world inform our understanding of language. It is the view held by FTLS that language consists of a set of forms that can be described at various levels - at the level of sounds, word formation, sentence formation, and discourse structure. Some aspects of meaning can be associated with each of these levels. Presented in this way, language becomes not simply a vehicle of thought, but also a system of categories; a means of communication which, without a reader (or listener’s) ‘accurate’ interpretation, can be of no use. This is the reason it emerged that interpretation during pedagogic communication was a difficult and risky process with no guarantee of a satisfactory outcome, even if one correctly identified the words and correctly worked out the syntactic structure of the sentence. Bourdieu (1989:8) presents reasons for such difficulty in a persuasive manner:

*This is because language does not reduce, as we often think, to a more or less extensive collection of words. As syntax, [language]*

*provides us with a system of transposable mental dispositions. These [mental dispositions] go hand in hand with values which dominate the whole of our experience and, in particular, with a vision of society and of culture. They [mental dispositions] also involve an original relationship to words...*

Engagement with data revealed that this conception calls for university practitioners to identify, recognise, and deal with the factors that separate them from students and, in particular, to acknowledge the importance of students' knowledge of the nature of the code of communication and the dependence of this knowledge on factors such as social origin and school background. This requires explicit teaching practice that will consider, first, the fact that academic language is no one's mother tongue and, secondly, that the existing divorce between the language of the family and the language of learning only serves to reinforce the students' feeling that the university education belongs to another world and that what lecturers have to say has nothing to do with daily life because it is spoken in a language which makes it unreal.

By choosing to mystify the language which includes them as members of the group, while ignoring the fact that they are not 'authors' of such a language (but are simply "interpellated", to use Althusser's terminology, by specific discursive formations), academics "conceal the contradictory character of their discourses to both themselves and to students" (Montgomery & Stuart, 1992:5). It is not surprising that the subtle social meanings posited in several disciplines are quite hard even for native speakers of English from outside the (academic) group to pick up, and are particularly difficult for non-native speakers. This breakdown in the teaching relationship is largely the consequence of the nature of disciplinary languages and how they are applied. Because of this, pedagogy loses all meaning, for it does not reflect the intention to communicate self reflexively, and thus to establish true communication (true dialogue) between a teacher and a learner.

## CHAPTER 5

We concluded that understanding in the university needs to be conceived as a function of the social group in which it is embedded. In the lecture hall, for instance, the desired outcome of the interaction that takes place between students and lecturers is the understanding of the language being taught and learnt. Because of this, understanding needs to become a social institution from which students can borrow and to which they can contribute. Meaning has to be negotiated between the participants in an interaction, for communication is a risky undertaking, requiring not simply the exchange of linguistically packaged ideas, but an effort of imagination on the part of the listener or reader. The implication for this, among many, is the fact that “understanding could be in [constant] state of flux; of augmentation, of modification, of radical transformation, of restructuring of its patterns of silence, or even of fading from current consciousness” (Bourdieu, 1989:7). The task for ADs is to raise academic staff awareness of the extent to which this fact underpins teaching and learning within their disciplines.

### **5.3.1. Institution-wide ADs contributions: broadening debates on pedagogy**

After the re-envisioning of FTLS strategic interventions that led to research-led AD interventions in faculties, and the results as reflected in the above section, a shift at the institutional level became the next level of intervention. This work began in March 2021. FTLS developed a conceptual document towards a series of 3 colloquia on Teaching and Learning scholarly conversations. *Responsive Curriculum Development* and *Decolonising Christianity*. By June 2021, several cross-faculty teams had successfully collaborated with CTL, and a notable scholar in Teaching and Learning from the United States, an equally leading academic in Philosophy from a South African university, and an eminent Christian minister for over 30 years availed themselves to be keynote speakers on each of the three colloquia. The three colloquia were: 1)

*Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, 2) Instantiations of Decolonised Curriculum, and 3) Decolonising Christianity: Implications for Preparing Future Ministers.* From 6 to 8 September 2021, NWU was visited by audiences of students and academics alike from within and outside SA borders, including Europe and the US. All three events were delivered in Hyflex mode, with direct participants such as two keynote presenters and most panellists in one venue, and the audience attending online synchronously. Engagements allowed ‘*Student Voice*’ to feature in ways not always possible, with a virtual space enabling students to express their thoughts with little to no fear.

For 2022, after consultative conversations between CTL, Theology and Health Sciences faculties, a topic for a follow-up, interdisciplinary Colloquium was developed: *Rethinking Health and Wellness in the Post-COVID Era: Implications for Teaching and Learning*. The plan culminated in a follow-up Colloquium on 15 June 2022. This time ‘*Student Voice*’ dominated the first 4-hour event, followed by eminent scholars in the fields of Higher Education Studies, Health Sciences and Theology. These institution-wide interventions by FTLS ADs extended beyond academic faculties. They extended to student residences.

In this regard, FTLS developed an idea for turning NWU residences into spaces for continuing learning. This was designed to enable student learning, and in the process offered academic support to students who lived in university on-campus residences. To achieve this, we drew from Kuh *et al.*'s (1997:371) observation that:

*...students spend the majority of their time out of class, how they spend their time is influenced by their peers, students acquire valuable skills often not presented via the curriculum [and that] involvement in out of class activities enables the student to experience a sense of community.*

## CHAPTER 5

Against the background of similar ideas, the Student Academic Development and Support (SADS) Team established the NWU residence-based academic learning communities. These were to be implemented in addition to the already existing support initiatives that were designed to enhance student success by CTL. Concisely, the strategy was born out of a recognition that we needed a rethink on how diverse students who live together and share a common academic focus (classes, courses, modules, disciplines, majors) may be grouped to establish formal academic learning communities within their residencies. Since this required stronger cooperation between faculties, CTL, the Division of Student Life and NWU campus residences, endless consultations were held with each of these stakeholders, culminating in a successful persuasion and the establishment of an integrated student support strategy that emphasised the continuity between in-class and out-of-class learning. This led to the promotion of students' academic success by coordinating several support strategies that (systematically) targeted academic and non-academic barriers to academic achievement.

This work aligned with Kuh *et al.*'s (1997:374) observation that "All aspects of the institution's environment contribute to student learning and personal development." Residential education is internationally commonly referred to as living-learning communities (LLCs). LLCs were established by the affiliates of the Association of College and University Housing Offices International and are based on the philosophy of learning beyond the classroom. The idea is to bring like-minded people together; hence LLCs are established around a wide range of thematic topics. Inkelas and Soldne (2011:1) define LLCs as "residence hall-based undergraduate programs with a particular topical or academic theme". This is the reason why an initiative on residence-based learning communities, commonly known as residential education, was supported by all stakeholders, including the Executive Director of Student Life. Following several iterations at different meetings within

CTL and Student Life, it was recommended that all Student Life Campus directors strengthen their support, and indeed involvement, in this initiative to ensure the academic project is the reason all entities in the University existed, and our goal to synergise our efforts was maximised. As we continued with this intervention in residences, it emerged that postgraduate students who stayed in residences, and those who were part-time, also required some intervention.

The main reason this became our priority was a recognition of the fact that CTL support tended to focus mainly on undergraduate students, and not on postgraduate students. It appeared CTL had generally focused mainly on undergraduate student support, and little to no available similar opportunities for postgraduate students. In the middle of 2020, we put together a University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG) application for funding with a focus only on postgraduate students' support. The application was successful, and we received three-year funding with a focus on supporting 'the pipeline, of South African Black and female postgraduate students. Consequently, we were able to establish the postgraduate research support project (PGRS), offering academic and research writing workshops, writing retreats and research hubs across the three campuses. Through the Research Office, we received an invitation to give a presentation to all NWU 'pipeline' Honours, Masters and Doctoral students. Our focus was on possible areas that could delay postgraduate research and how to overcome the delays. This cross-faculty institution-wide webinar received encouraging feedback and students who could not join requested another slot. We then gave the same presentation twice, something that was not part of the initial planning. With the assistance of the Division of Strategic Intelligence, it was easier to invite all 'pipe-line' postgraduate students from all the faculties. It was this group that gave us the privilege to address critical components of the postgraduate studies journey. Since the funding enabled us to appoint three (one-per-campus) senior-level



## CHAPTER 5

ADs, astounding support from various faculties emerged as academics saw the healthy contribution FTLS was making; this time at the postgraduate level.

### 5.4 Concluding reflections

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Despite the challenges that came with being one university as a result of the merging of three formerly distinct HEIs, senior leadership in FTLS (one of the directorates in the CTL at NWU) initiated a scholarly informed and research-led rethinking of the academic support strategy offered to university teachers. This rethinking of the strategic approach to supporting the academic project was accompanied by the reorganisation of the team within FTLS, as well as making bridges that enabled ADs to enter faculties as partners with middle managers and academics. This strategy proved useful because it resulted in support that had a decolonising effect on pedagogic practices that tended to be opaque, and thus exclusionary. The construction of grounded data between faculty membership and ADs engendered the collaboration between the CTL and faculties with a collective commitment to see the problem as that of NWU, and not only for one of the parties. The fact that there are three campuses did not deter FTLS. There was recognition that even though some academic development work could be aligned, engagement in supporting the academic project repeatedly proved that support is always situational and, inadvertently, contextual. The New Literacy Studies' three concepts, combined with the conceptualisation developed from TiLT, LCT, and GT, enabled the FTLS team's rethinking of its strategy to reach this conclusion. The work is ongoing, but the foundation that has been laid as discussed in this paper, will remain a strong point of departure for years to come.

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## CHAPTER 6

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### Fostering Inclusive curriculum practice for pre-service teachers in higher education

*Mochina Mphuthi*

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter explores the integration of cultural and traditional elements into pre-service teacher education. It hopes to address a scholarly gap existing in educational frameworks, which often overlook the holistic and culturally rich aspects of curriculum practice in teacher education. How inclusive curriculum practices could enhance the incorporation of cultural diversity in pre-service teacher education is the question the chapter hopes to address. Multicultural Education Theory (MET) informs the exploration of existing literature in the subject.

**Keywords:** inclusive curriculum, Multicultural Education Theory, educational framework, cultural responsiveness.

## 6.1 Introduction

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The field of education keeps transforming to address the varied needs of an increasingly multicultural learner population. This dynamic evolution is particularly evident in pre-service teacher education, where inclusive curriculum practices are essential in preparing educators for diverse classroom contexts (Engelbrecht & Ekins, 2017). This literature review examines existing research on the incorporation of cultural and traditional aspects within the curriculum of higher education, especially within pre-service teacher training programmes.

Inclusive curriculum practice in this context involves teaching strategies that recognise and integrate the diverse cultural, traditional, and personal backgrounds of pre-service teachers. While significant strides have been made in incorporating cultural and linguistic diversity (Ndimande-Hlongwa & Ndebele, 2017), the integration of broader cultural and traditional values remains insufficiently explored. Such values, which can provide unique cultural insights and connections to community wisdom, are crucial in developing teaching strategies that are responsive to the needs of all students (Kovach, 2021).

Despite the growing acknowledgment of diversity, systematic approaches to embedding culture and tradition in educational frameworks remain limited. Gay (2018) notes that the absence of a comprehensive framework in pre-service teacher education could hinder the development of truly responsive and inclusive pedagogies. By critically analysing the existing literature, this review aims to identify and discuss the methods and benefits of incorporating cultural and traditional diversity into curriculum practice, thereby fostering a more inclusive educational environment for pre-service teachers and learners alike (Zhang & Wu, 2016).

Furthermore, this review highlights effective strategies and the existing gaps in research concerning the integration of cultural and traditional elements in pre-service teacher education, offering insights into how these practices could be enhanced and better implemented to meet the evolving needs of the educational landscape.

## 6.2 Problem Statement

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Despite growing recognition of inclusive curriculum practices in pre-service teacher education, there remains a significant gap in the integration and utilisation of cultural and traditional elements within educational frameworks (Gulya & Fehervari, 2024). This gap hinders the development of holistic and culturally responsive pedagogies, which are essential in enabling learners to thrive in diverse educational settings. Consequently, there is a pressing need for a systematic review to explore the existing literature, identify gaps, and provide insights into how these cultural and traditional elements could be more effectively integrated into curriculum practices.

By synthesising current research findings, this study identifies gaps, challenges, and best practices in fostering inclusive curriculum approaches that recognise and leverage the diverse cultural backgrounds of future educators. Ultimately, the review provides valuable insights and recommendations for enhancing teacher preparation programmes to better support the holistic development and cultural responsiveness of pre-service teachers.

## 6.3 Research question

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How can inclusive curriculum practices that integrate cultural and traditional elements enhance the preparation and effectiveness of pre-service teachers in culturally diverse educational settings?



## 6.4 Population Intervention and Context (PICO) Framework

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The PICO framework, as outlined by Harris *et al.* (2018), provides a structured approach to exploring the impact of inclusive curriculum practices on pre-service teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds. This framework focuses on several key elements: the Population (pre-service teachers from various cultural backgrounds), the Intervention (inclusive curriculum practices that specifically integrate cultural and traditional elements) and the Context (educational settings characterised by significant cultural diversity). By addressing these components, the framework enhances our understanding of how tailored educational strategies could equip future educators better to handle the complexities and opportunities presented by culturally diverse learning contexts.

### 6.4.1. PICO framework (Harris *et al.*, 2018):

**Population:** Pre-service teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds

**Intervention:** Inclusive curriculum practices that specifically integrate cultural and traditional elements

**Context:** Educational settings characterised by significant cultural diversity

## 6.5 Research Design and Methodology

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This literature review employs a systematic approach to explore and synthesise existing research on the integration of cultural and traditional elements in pre-service teacher education. It utilises comprehensive database searches, predefined inclusion criteria, and rigorous analytical methods to ensure a thorough examination of the relevant literature.

### **6.5.1. Theoretical framework**

This systematic review adopts the Multicultural Education Theory, developed by James A Banks, which provides a framework for reforming education to ensure students from diverse backgrounds achieve academic success. The theory outlines five key concepts: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure. All these are designed to create educational environments that acknowledge and respect cultural diversity, promoting equality and justice within the classroom (Banks, 1993).

The first of these, content integration, involves the use of examples, data, and information from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalisations, and theories in the subject taught. This approach not only enriches the learning experiences but also allows students to see the contributions of their own and others' cultures to the development of various fields, fostering a deeper appreciation for diversity (Banks, 1993). Building on this, Sachs (1986) comments that the knowledge construction process encourages educators and students to critically analyse how knowledge itself is created, shaped, and influenced by cultural, political, and socioeconomic contexts. Such critical engagement helps pre-service teachers develop the ability to challenge and expand prevailing perspectives within educational content, promoting a more inclusive approach to teaching and learning.

Furthermore, Akcaoglu (2021) emphasises the theory on prejudice reduction, which focuses on strategies that educators can use to help students develop positive attitudes toward diverse cultural groups. Akcaoglu (2021) maintains that fostering an environment that counters stereotype and promotes mutual respect for the 'other' is crucial in reducing biases and misconceptions; thus preparing students to interact

## CHAPTER 6

respectfully in diverse societies. Equally, equity in pedagogy complements these approaches by requiring teacher educators to modify their teaching methods to accommodate the diverse learning styles of students from various ethnic and racial backgrounds (Banks, 1993). This adaptation ensures that all students have an equal opportunity to gain experience and succeed, which is vital for the academic success of students from marginalized communities (Hammond, 2014).

Empowering school culture and social structures involves restructuring the culture and organisation of schools to ensure that students from diverse groups experience a learning setting that is inclusive, supportive, and empowering. This restructuring includes promoting diversity in staffing policies, student leadership opportunities, and other school practices that bolster a sense of belonging and engagement among all students (Banks, 1993).

Multicultural Education Theory is relevant to this systematic review and the research question as it offers valuable insights. By incorporating these theoretical components into the curriculum, pre-service teacher education programmes can more effectively prepare pre-service teachers to manage their culturally diverse classrooms in the future. This alignment enhances their effectiveness and responsiveness to the diverse needs of learners, thereby underlining the critical role of cultural and traditional elements in teacher education.

### **6.5.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

The systematic review adheres to a clearly defined set of inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance of the literature analysed (Booth, 2016). The inclusion criteria are designed to select studies that address the integration of cultural and traditional elements in pre-service teacher education, with emphasis on inclusive curriculum

practices. This approach ensures that the data directly contributes to an understanding of how cultural and traditional elements can be integrated into teaching methodologies. Conversely, the exclusion criteria filter out studies that do not align with these core themes, including those outside the scope of pre-service teacher education, lacking an emphasis on inclusive practices related to culture and tradition, non-peer-reviewed or non-academic research, and publications in languages other than English due to the linguistic limitations of the researcher. These criteria enhance the integrity and focus of the study.

**Inclusion criteria (Booth, 2016)**

- Studies that focus on pre-service teacher education
- Research that explicitly discusses inclusive curriculum practices
- Papers that address the integration of cultural insights and traditional practices within educational frameworks
- Peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and conference papers published in English

**Exclusion criteria (Booth, 2016)**

- Studies not specifically related to pre-service teacher education
- Articles that do not address inclusive curriculum practices and the integration of cultural insights and traditional practices within educational frameworks
- Non-peer-reviewed articles, opinion pieces, and non-academic literature
- Publications in languages other than English, due to language constraints of the reviewer

## CHAPTER 6

### **Search strategy and terms**

The search strategy for this systematic review was designed to capture a comprehensive range of relevant literature. Utilising prominent electronic databases such as ERIC, EBSCOHost, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, the search incorporated a combination of key terms and their synonyms to ensure breadth and depth in the literature surveyed. Key terms include "Pre-service teachers," "Inclusive curriculum," "Cultural integration," "Traditional elements," and "Culturally responsive teaching." These terms were employed in various combinations, using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to refine the search process (Atkinson & Cipriani, 2018). The temporal scope of the search is limited to publications from the last 20 years, providing a contemporary perspective on integration of cultural and traditional elements in pre-service teacher education. This approach is designed to yield a rich and relevant pool of literature, encompassing diverse perspectives and methodologies pertinent to focus of the study.

### **Search queries**

- "Pre-service teachers" AND "Cultural integration"
- "Inclusive curriculum" AND "teacher education"
- "Traditional elements" OR "education"
- "Culturally responsive teaching" AND "traditional practices"

Boolean operators (Atkinson & Cipriani, 2018) (AND, OR) were used to refine the search, focusing on documents published within the last 20 years to ensure relevance and applicability to current educational contexts. Atkinson and Cipriani (2018) further elaborate that using Boolean operators (AND, OR) in a search can make results more precise and relevant. They are named after George Boole, the mathematician who developed Boolean algebra.

### Data extraction and analysis

Data was extracted for analysis, focusing on author, year of publication, study context, methodology, key findings, and any challenges or gaps outlined in the studies. Thematic analysis was used to identify and analyse patterns within the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This approach allowed for the identification of themes across different studies, providing insights into the overall effectiveness and challenges of integrating cultural and traditional elements in pre-service teacher education.

## 6.6 Results and discussion

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### 6.6.1. Overview of findings

The systematic review of fifteen studies established diverse strategies for integrating spiritual gifts in pre-service teacher education. Common themes included the emphasis on culturally responsive curriculum practice, the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge systems, and the importance of personal and spiritual development in teacher training.

**Table 6.1: Summary of the data extraction**

No, Author/s, Year	Study Focus	Findings	Implications
1. Pauly 2003	The study investigates the role of traditional cultural narratives in teacher education	The study identifies a significant role of cultural narrative in shaping pre-service teachers' understanding of diverse student backgrounds	The article highlights the need for integrating cultural narratives into the curriculum to enhance cultural competence among pre-service teachers
2	The study critiques the current	Students' exposure to critical thinking and	The study suggests that Humanities

## CHAPTER 6

<a href="#">Mgqwashu</a> 2004	pedagogical practices in Humanities faculties, highlighting the neglect of students' language needs.	the broad, reflective understanding of language as central to engaging with societal complexities is limited.	faculties need to re-evaluate their pedagogical practices to ensure they do not compromise their identity and essential role in fostering critical and reflective thinkers.
3. Owuor 2007	The focus of the study is on the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems in education.	The findings of the study illustrate that the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge fosters a deeper connection between students' cultural heritage and their learning environment.	The implications of the study are that educational frameworks should incorporate Indigenous perspectives to provide a more holistic and inclusive education.
4. Chitindingu and Mkhize 2016	The study establishes that targeted diversity training enhances teachers' abilities to adapt pedagogical strategies to a multicultural classroom setting.	The study establishes that targeted diversity training enhances teachers' abilities to adapt pedagogical strategies to a multicultural classroom setting.	The study argues for mandatory diversity training for pre-service teachers to better prepare them for the challenges of culturally diverse classrooms.
5. Khumalo and Baloyi 2017	The study investigates the effects of traditional and cultural arts on pre-service teacher training.	The study concludes that traditional arts can be an effective tool for teaching complex cultural concepts and improving cultural sensitivity among teachers.	This study recommends the integration of traditional arts into teacher education programmes to enhance understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural expressions.
6	The study investigates the	The study highlights the importance of	The findings of this study underscore the

Ragoonaden and Mueller 2017	impact of culturally responsive pedagogy on an introductory university course at the University of British Columbia's Okanagan Campus.	integrating Indigenous traditions in higher education, and the positive influence on student's social and emotional well-being.	importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in higher education, particularly in courses involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. It highlights the need for universities to adapt their curricula to include Indigenous perspectives and teaching methods.
7 Engelbrecht and Savolainen 2018	The study explores teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, their self-efficacy beliefs, and their practical approaches to implementing inclusive education in classrooms within two culturally diverse countries.	The research demonstrates that teachers' attitudes towards and enactment of inclusive education are complex, multifaceted, and non-linear. These attitudes and practices are significantly influenced by the teachers' cultural and historical contexts.	The findings suggest that efforts to implement inclusive education must consider the cultural-historical context of teachers and schools. Professional development and training programmes should be designed to address the complexities and contradictions in teachers' attitudes and practices regarding inclusive education.
8 Gay 2018	Provides an in-depth exploration of culturally responsive teaching, integrating new research and broadening the focus to include a wider range of racial and ethnic groups. It examines the theory, research, and practice behind	Culturally responsive teaching positively affects students' academic achievement across multiple measures when teaching practices align with students' cultural experiences.	The findings underscore the necessity of integrating culturally responsive teaching practices in educational settings to cater to the diverse needs of students. This approach not only enhances academic



## CHAPTER 6

	culturally responsive teaching, emphasising its significance in improving students' academic performance through teaching methods that resonate with their cultural experiences.		outcomes but also improves the quality of life for students of colour in higher education.
9 Wynter-Hoyte, Braden, Rodriguez, and Thornton 2019	The study focuses on examining the application of culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) in classrooms with young diverse populations. It explores the classroom features that support culturally sustaining learning and the social, cultural, and linguistic resources that learners utilise in such environments.	Children draw upon a wide array of knowledge sources from their social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Teachers need to adeptly navigate educational policies to implement practices that leverage students' cultural referents effectively.	The study suggests that creating supportive and safe classroom environments, recognising, and utilising the rich cultural resources that students bring, and empowering teachers to implement culturally informed practices are essential steps toward disrupting the status quo in education.
10 Merisi, Pillay and Mqgwashu 2022	The study concentrates on addressing the oversight of pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning within pre-service teacher education programmes.	Pre-service teachers enter TEPs with established beliefs about teaching and learning that are often ignored.	The study highlights the necessity of re-evaluating and adapting pre-service teacher education curricula to include pre-service teachers' beliefs, particularly regarding spiritual and cultural insights.

## **6.6.2. Thematic analysis of the summary of articles**

### **Cultural competence and relevance**

Pauly (2003) emphasises traditional cultural narratives in shaping pre-service teachers' understanding of diverse student backgrounds. This highlights the importance of integrating these narratives into educational curriculum practice to enhance cultural competence in the teacher education programme. Khumalo and Baloyi (2017) further illustrate the practical application of cultural elements, demonstrating how traditional arts can serve as effective tools for teaching complex cultural concepts and enhancing cultural sensitivity.

### **Language and critical thinking**

Mgqwashu (2004) critiques the pedagogical neglect of language needs in Humanities faculties, emphasising that a broad, reflective understanding of language is central to engaging with societal complexities. This study suggests the need for pedagogical practices that do not compromise the faculty's identity and their role in fostering critical and reflective thinkers. Furthermore, addressing these gaps not only strengthens the academic rigour within humanities disciplines but also equips students to navigate and contribute meaningfully to a multifaceted global society. Therefore, re-evaluating and enhancing language-focused pedagogy could improve the critical capacities and cultural competencies of future graduates.

### **Integration of Indigenous knowledge and diversity training**

Owuor (2007) emphasises the importance of integrating Indigenous knowledge systems in education, which fosters a deep connection between students' cultural heritage and their learning environment. This inclusion advocates for a holistic educational framework that embraces Indigenous perspectives. Complementing this, Chitindingu and Mkhize (2016) demonstrate the critical role of diversity training in

## CHAPTER 6

enhancing teachers' abilities to adapt their teaching strategies for multicultural classroom settings. They argue for mandatory diversity training in the preparation of pre-service teachers to navigate the complexities of culturally diverse classrooms effectively.

### **Culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies**

Ragoonaden and Mueller (2017) highlight the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy in higher education and they discuss its positive influence on students' social and emotional well-being through the integration of Indigenous traditions. Similarly, Gay (2018) explores how teaching methods that resonate with students' cultural experiences significantly improve academic performance and overall quality of life. In addition, Wynter-Hoyte *et al.* (2019) emphasise pedagogies that not only respond to but sustain cultural diversity, advocating for classroom environments that actively leverage the rich cultural resources students bring.

### **Teacher attitudes towards inclusive education**

Engelbrecht and Savolainen (2018) investigate the complexities of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education within culturally diverse contexts. Their findings suggest that teachers' practices are profoundly influenced by their cultural and historical backgrounds. There is a need for professional development programmes tailored to these contexts. Such training should reconcile the contradictions in teachers' attitudes and enhance their ability to implement inclusive educational practices effectively.

### **The role of teachers' beliefs in pre-service education**

Merisi, Pillay and Mqgwashu (2022) address the often-overlooked aspect of pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, which include cultural and spiritual insights. They argue for a re-evaluation of a teacher education curriculum to incorporate these

beliefs more comprehensively, ensuring that pre-service education aligns with the real-world dynamics and cultural complexities of diverse classrooms. This approach underscores the necessity of preparing educators not only to understand diverse educational contexts but also to reflect critically on their pedagogical beliefs and practices. These themes altogether emphasise the importance of integrating cultural competencies and responsive pedagogies into pre-service teacher education, highlighting the role of diversity training, Indigenous knowledge, and teachers' attitudes and beliefs in fostering effective and inclusive educational environments.

### **Challenges and gaps identified**

The review identified significant challenges in integrating cultural and traditional elements into pre-service teacher education. A primary concern was the absence of a standardised framework or clear guidelines for educators on how to incorporate these diverse elements effectively. This absence often compels educators to rely on personal discretion, resulting in inconsistent practices across different programmes and institutions.

Another challenge noted was the cultural sensitivity and complexity surrounding the integration of Indigenous and cultural content. Some educators and institutions hesitate or even resist fully integrating such elements, often due to concerns about disrupting the existing curriculum frameworks or fears of misrepresenting or misappropriating cultural elements. This resistance underscores the need for careful, respectful, and inclusive approaches to cultural content in educational settings, ensuring that such integration is thoughtful and genuinely enriches the learning environment.

Furthermore, the studies identify gaps, particularly in longitudinal research, which would track the long-term effects of these integrative strategies on curriculum practices, pre-service teacher preparedness,

## CHAPTER 6

and learner outcomes. There is also a scarcity of research on the specific impact of diverse cultural and traditional practices within diverse educational contexts. This lack of comprehensive data hampers the formulation of definitive conclusions and development of robust, evidence-based strategies for incorporating cultural and traditional elements effectively in pre-service teacher education programmes.

### **Theoretical implications**

The findings of this systematic review, through the lens of Multicultural Education Theory, provide a comprehensive framework for integrating cultural and traditional elements in pre-service teacher education. The theory's emphasis on content integration and knowledge construction highlights how the inclusion of diverse cultural narratives and Indigenous knowledge systems could enrich the curriculum, thereby broadening the educational perspectives of pre-service teachers (Banks, 1993). This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also fosters a deep appreciation for cultural diversity, aligning with the findings from studies on the importance of cultural competence in educational settings.

Moreover, the components of prejudice reduction and equity pedagogy as outlined by Banks (1993) are critical in addressing the challenges identified in the review. By actively working to reduce biases and adapting teaching methods that accommodate diverse learning styles, pre-service teacher programmes can ensure that all students, regardless of their cultural or ethnic backgrounds, have equitable opportunities to succeed (Banks, 1993; Hammond, 2014). This theoretical alignment supports the need for curriculum practice that not only recognises but actively includes and values diverse cultural and traditional elements, promoting a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Furthermore, empowering school culture and social structure speaks directly to the necessity of reconfiguring educational environments to

be more inclusive and supportive of diversity. This aspect of the theory suggests that educational institutions should promote diversity in staffing and student leadership, which would foster a sense of belonging and engagement among all students (Banks, 1993). By applying these theoretical components, the review underscores the importance of creating educational settings that are not only culturally responsive but also culturally sustaining, ensuring that pre-service teachers are well-groomed to teach in and contribute to an increasingly diverse society.

Thus, Multicultural Education Theory provides a robust theoretical grounding for this systematic review, highlighting how effectively integrating cultural and traditional elements into the curriculum enhances the preparation and effectiveness of pre-service teachers in culturally diverse educational settings. This theoretical framework supports a shift towards more holistic and inclusive approaches in teacher education.

### **Practical implications for pre-service teacher education**

These findings emphasise the necessity of integrating cultural and traditional elements in teacher education to prepare educators for diverse educational settings effectively. Each study contributes to understanding how cultural competence, responsiveness, and inclusion can be fostered through educational practices. This aligns with the research question, highlighting how inclusive curriculum practices that integrate cultural and traditional elements enhance the preparation and effectiveness of pre-service teachers in culturally diverse educational settings. This alignment highlights the critical role of such integration in fostering more responsive and adaptable educators equipped to manage the complexities of modern classrooms.

To enhance the cultural competence of future educators, pre-service teacher education programmes must prioritise the integration of comprehensive cultural content. This includes developing and

## CHAPTER 6

implementing curriculum practices that not only cover diverse cultural traditions but also critically engages with these traditions to foster a deeper understanding and respect. Professional development opportunities for educators should be expanded to include training in culturally responsive teaching methods, ensuring that all educators are equipped to manage and appreciate the diversity of student backgrounds.

Collaboration between educational institutions and cultural communities should be encouraged to provide real-world learning experiences for pre-service teachers. These partnerships can offer unique insights and direct exposure to diverse cultural practices, which are invaluable for developing empathetic and informed teachers. By creating structured opportunities for pre-service teachers to interact with and learn from diverse cultural groups, educational programmes can ensure that their graduates are well-prepared to create and lead inclusive, culturally aware, classrooms.

### **Recommendations for future research**

Future research in the field of pre-service teacher education should delve deeper into the long-term impact of integrating cultural and traditional elements within educational curriculum practice. Investigating how such integration influences teacher effectiveness and student outcomes over time would provide valuable insights into the sustainability and depth of their impact. Comparative studies across various educational settings and cultural contexts are recommended to understand the diverse applications and effects of cultural integration, enhancing the generalisability of the findings.

Added to this, a palpable gap exists in research regarding the direct experiences of pre-service teachers with culturally enriched curriculum practice. Future studies could focus on generating qualitative and quantitative data from pre-service teachers themselves, exploring their

perceptions, challenges, and the benefits they perceive from engaging with diverse cultural content. This approach could help in identifying specific areas within teacher education programmes that could benefit from enhanced cultural components.

Exploratory research could also be conducted on the efficacy of different pedagogical approaches in teaching cultural and traditional elements. This includes examining which methods most effectively foster an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment. Such research would provide practical insights that could directly inform curriculum development and teaching strategies, ultimately leading to more effective educational practices that respect and incorporate global cultural diversity.

## 6.7 Conclusion

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This systematic review underscores the benefits of integrating cultural and traditional elements into pre-service teacher education. Such integration not only promotes a more inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy but also supports a broader shift towards embracing diversity and pluriversity in educational settings. The findings highlight how cultural and traditional insights provide transformative learning experiences for both educators and pre-service teachers, effectively challenging and expanding conventional educational frameworks.

However, the review also identifies notable challenges, including the lack of standardised frameworks for integrating these cultural elements, the need to address cultural sensitivities carefully, and the scarcity of longitudinal research on the long-term impacts of such integrations. Addressing these challenges is essential for fully realising the potential of cultural and traditional elements to enhance pre-service teacher



education and, by extension, improve the educational experiences of future student generations.

### 6.8 Limitations and recommendations

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The review highlights several critical areas for improvement and development in the integration of cultural and traditional elements into pre-service teacher education. Educational authorities and institutions are encouraged to develop standardised frameworks or guidelines that would aid in the consistent integration of these elements across various educational settings. This initiative could involve the creation of best practice models, comprehensive teaching resources, and targeted training modules to support educators.

Moreover, there is a strong recommendation for ongoing professional development opportunities that focus on how to incorporate cultural diversity respectfully and effectively into educational curriculum practice. Such training should aim to equip educators with the skills necessary to manage and value diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, fostering partnerships with various cultural communities can provide real-world exposure and valuable learning opportunities for pre-service teachers, enhancing their practical and people skills.

The expansion of research, particularly through longitudinal studies, is also advocated to understand the long-term impacts of integrating cultural and traditional elements in education better. This effort should fill the current gaps in the literature and provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these integrative practices influence educational outcomes. Establishing mentorship programmes that connect novice teachers with experienced educators skilled in culturally responsive teaching could further facilitate the transfer of knowledge and practical application.

However, the review also acknowledges several limitations. The diversity and scope of the literature specifically focused on the integration of detailed cultural elements such as traditional practices are limited, often embedded within broader discussions of inclusive practices. Furthermore, the review's linguistic scope was confined to English, potentially overlooking significant studies published in other languages. Furthermore, the interpretation of the included studies may carry inherent biases, which could affect the generalisability of findings. Recognising these limitations is essential, not only for a balanced understanding of the subject but also for guiding future research, ensuring that it addresses these gaps and builds on the foundational knowledge established in this review.

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## CHAPTER 7

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# Student's feedback on lecturer online instruction competence at a University of Technology

*Papi A Lemeko*

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### Abstract

The focus of this study is on the challenges and problems, as well as opportunities brought about by online learning and teaching in higher education. It seeks to capture students' perspectives on online learning and instruction based on the instructors' competence; thus attempting to map future teaching and learning models. To generate data, a quantitative survey and interviews were used. A questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions to determine both the breadth and depth of students' perceptions of lecturer competence was used to generate quantitative and qualitative data. Three themes emerged from the data: planning and preparation, course execution and learner support.

**Keywords:** online instruction competence, end users, online learning.

## 7.1 Introduction

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Our education system is expected to meet the requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Harnessing technology for innovative teaching and learning will allow both the lecturer and student to have effective learning experiences. To transform learning and teaching experiences we need to include technology in our day-to-day teaching and learning. As institutions of higher learning, we need to respond to the demands of innovation. These demands can be addressed by effectively including technology in our teaching and learning environment. Advancements in technology will open paths for innovation and experimentation in higher education.

In South Africa, as well as other countries throughout the world, the entire educational system from primary to tertiary levels has been challenged by restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 lockdown period that began in early 2020. During that time, many facets of society were affected in all spheres of influence, and education was one of the hardest hit as learning could not continue physically (Mehić & Hadžić 2020). This is because COVID-19 is a highly contagious illness caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Remuzzi & Remuzzi, 2020). Online learning thus quickly replaced on-campus schooling (Martin, 2020). Some colleges and universities already provide tuition through online platforms, but many do not. Consequently instructors and learners alike faced the challenge of becoming used to a radically different kind of learning when all the coursework had to be delivered online. It is thus crucial for the tertiary sector to assess the effects and success or failure of this unprecedented change in the delivery mode because these "remote learning regimes" (Martin, 2020) are likely to persist in alignment with the fourth and some parts of the world, the fifth industrial revolutions where artificial intelligence and digital technologies are seizing workspaces. Only a few

studies have since focused on the evaluation of the effectiveness of online instruction; hence the rationale for the current study.

The transformation in the worldwide industrial revolution and the expansion of knowledge have immensely influenced the agenda of global governance and management in higher education (Perumal, 2010). This change has led countries and government authorities to develop higher education policies that adopt business-like practices to manage competition in the global market environment. Rapid changes in these universal market environments have resulted in an increased demand for the advancement of economic growth and social improvement (Mtshali & Sooryamoorthy, 2019). As the drivers of economic growth and development, universities have a significant role in meeting the needs and demands of advancing the economic and social components (Cloete, Bunting & Maassen, 2015). South Africa is no exception, as commanding powers are driving increased societal demands for higher education services (Du Pre, Reddy & Scott, 2004).

Higher education in South Africa entails numerous universities that offer a varied educational pathway to students. These universities are usually classified under three types (Bunting & Cloete, 2010; Masinde & Roux, 2020). The first type of university is known as a traditional university, in which formative and professional degrees such as Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Bachelor of Engineering (BSc Eng) are offered. At a postgraduate level, this type of university offers honours degrees and a wide range of master's and doctoral degrees. The second type of university is known as the University of Technology (UoT), which is primarily established to offer vocational or career-focused undergraduate diplomas and BTech, which serves as a topping qualification for diploma graduates. In this case, at the postgraduate level, the UoT offers a restricted number of master's and doctoral degrees. The last type of university is known as a comprehensive



## CHAPTER 7

university that offers programmes of both the traditional university and the UoT. Although all three types of universities are essential towards advancing societal and economic growth within a country, this chapter focuses on the UoT.

UoT is a type of university that focuses on offering career-oriented schooling and training in applied engineering, sciences, technology, and related fields. It emphasises problem-solving and career-directed courses by providing students with practical skill development and theoretical knowledge. Also, it emphasises innovation, research and industrial partnerships to produce graduates who are equipped with technical expertise and are capable of contributing towards societal and economic growth and development in a country.

### 7.2 Online instruction competency

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Early research on the difficulties associated with online instruction found that students were not engaged (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020), lecturers lacked pedagogical and technological competency (Hadar *et al.*, 2020), and lecturers and students alike needed more time to get used to online teaching (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). During COVID-19, online instruction competency and information and communication technologies (ICT) tools played a crucial role in assisting lecturers in adjusting to online instruction. Since having online competency is essential to maintaining connection and engagement in the online environment, the lecturer's online competence was particularly significant in stopping the continuity of social contact with students and offering online instruction to the students.

Green and Bettini (2020) explain that online instruction competency includes lecturers' self-perceptions of their knowledge and skills, their assurance in using online instructional technology, their capacity to

involve students in remote learning and their online classroom management. Online learning refers to education that makes use of a variety of internet-based technologies, including chat, email, YouTube, online, text messaging, audio and video conferencing that are transmitted over computer networks to deliver instructional materials. Online learning is defined by Singh and Thurman (2019) as an asynchronous or synchronous learning environment that makes use of multiple devices and is always accompanied by internet access. This allows for communication not only between students and educators but also between students and lecturers themselves, even though it does not occur simultaneously. When creating and delivering online courses, online lectures take on a variety of tasks and exhibit a range of competencies. The lecturer's voice is one of the key components of online instruction.

Several ways have been used to classify competencies for online competency, and they have been classed at different levels in the literature. Fatimah (2020) outlines and divides the abilities or capabilities of instructors into five categories: content expertise, technical proficiency, online communication skills, online process comprehension, and personal traits. He further argues that the foundations of online pedagogy and instruction should be understood by effective online instructors. They need to apply a wide range of concepts and techniques to show that they are competent in offering online instruction. Badiozaman and Segar (2022) claim that online instruction competency necessitates a different pedagogy and set of abilities than traditional classroom instruction.

The need for online instruction has grown due to COVID-19-related socioeconomic situations as well as technology advancements. For online instruction to be successful, lecturers must possess certain technological competencies. Numerous categories make up online

## CHAPTER 7

teaching competencies. Shank (2004) lists the following categories that can be found in the literature: technology/technical skills, online communication skills, pedagogical knowledge, teaching methods and strategies, online education and content; field expertise, personal characteristics, process management and facilitation, planning and preparation, course management, and evaluation. Lecturers need to be experts in these areas to teach effectively online.

### 7.3 Purpose of the study

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The purpose of the study was to investigate first-year students' perceptions of the lecturer's online instruction competence. The move from face-to-face to online teaching and learning mode made students and lecturers uncomfortable with this new mode of teaching, especially in those institutions where online teaching and learning was not a requirement prior to Covid 19. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to rapidly change our mode of teaching and learning. This was a new experience for lecturers and students alike; hence the researcher investigated the students' perceptions of lecturers' online instruction competence.

The researcher intended to establish how students, as the recipients, gauge lecturers' online instruction skills. Thus the research question posed was: What is the Intercultural Studies students' perception of their lecturer's online instruction competence? Though the sample was not representative of all the instructors, the responses can contribute to the mapping of future online instructional strategies.

### 7.4 Conceptual underpinning

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The researcher applied a student-centred strategy and encouraged students to be actively involved in their learning and decision-making. It

is the view of the researcher that the strategy must be student-centred, and that students must be encouraged to be actively involved in their learning and decision-making. The lecturer will play the role of a facilitator and challenge students to use their abilities to learn. With the student-centred strategy, students have total control over what and how they learn. This strategy encourages the students to take responsibility for their learning. The researcher is of the view that if this strategy is applied correctly in the teaching and learning environment, students will be motivated and they will have the willingness to learn.

O'Dell and Sulastri (2019) highlight that the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a person's intention to use technology influenced by two factors: perceived usefulness, which measures how much a person believes using technology will improve performance, and perceived ease of use, which measures how much a person believes using technology will make finishing tasks easier. The author opted for TAM because it is the model that predicts the acceptance of computer applications. It must also be noted that at this university of technology's participants were not used to online instruction and assessment. Facilities were provided to participants which were first-year students by the time the evaluation was conducted, and they did not struggle to use the computer facilities provided to them.

The Technology Adoption Model (TAM) propounded by Davis (1989) underpins the current study. Electronic learning, often known as e-learning, is becoming more common in many higher educational institutions. A large body of research on technology adoption has sought to discover, forecast, and describe the factors that influence how individuals and organizations accept and use technological breakthroughs (Dube *et al.*, 2020). Technology adoption, as described by Khasawneh (2008), is the initial use or acceptance of a new technology or system. Related theories and models of the TAM: the

## CHAPTER 7

theory of reasoned action (TRA), the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), the technology-organization-environment (TOE), and the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT), help to explain how people adopt new technologies. The current study seeks to determine students' perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and instructor attitude toward the use of online platforms for learning as these are the indicators of Davis' (1989) TAM model. The respondents' views are based on the instructor's digital competence.

### 7.5 Methodology

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The study sought to assess the depth and breadth of lecturers' online teaching proficiency from the viewpoint of their students. 47 first-year university of technology students studying Intercultural Studies were given an online survey questionnaire with a view to conduct the study. Participants were informed via email by the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT). In the context of this study the researcher used an online survey questionnaire which consisted of qualitative and quantitative paradigm in investigating first-year students' perceptions of the lecturer's online instruction competence. The online survey combined the two research paradigms so that students' diverse viewpoints could cast light on this study. The instrument which was used to collect data consisted of section A, which consisted of multiple-choice questions and section B, which consisted of open-ended short questions. These ensured that the researcher gained a bigger picture of students' perceptions of the lecturer's online instruction competence. The use of quantitative research methods in the study enabled the researcher to obtain a sound data analysis which was done using six-point Likert scale; hence valid and reliable results were obtained at the end of the research journey. The use of qualitative methods in the study assisted the researcher in understanding the human behaviour and

feelings of the students towards the lecturer's online competency. Notably, only a maximum of 27 out of the 47 students responded to each item in section B, which is qualitative. If the same students managed to complete Section A, it could be surmised that the students were reluctant to complete this section because it required some thought. This distorted a clear grasp of the entire group's sentiments. However, the responses captured provided crucial information that can contribute to the future of online instruction. The participants in this study were 47 first-year students studying Intercultural Studies and who are the internet users.

The researcher used an existing questionnaire which was designed by CILT. This questionnaire was distributed online by CILT so that students could give feedback on the lecturer's online competency. It must be noted that the researcher is the lecturer who was evaluated by the students, and he was not part of the evaluation process. Post the evaluation of the lecturer the report was sent to the lecturer by CILT. It is worth noting that the researcher requested permission to use the results before the conceptualisation of this paper, and permission was granted by CILT. The author applied for ethical clearance from the Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Approval. With a view to collect data for this study, questionnaires were distributed online for ease of access to participants. It must be admitted that this method has a disadvantage of low response rate.

The findings cannot be generalised because they are based on the case of one lecturer. However, the researcher believes that these findings can provide important indications of online teaching skills by lecturers that can be used to rethink learning models, tailor-make online instruction training needs for lecturers and map the future of online instruction. Students, as end users, are in the best position to give feedback on their online learning experiences based on the instructor's competence.

## CHAPTER 7

Future studies should synthesise students' feedback on lecturers' competence in online instruction to gain a more holistic determination of lecturers' readiness for online instruction and training needs according to their demographics. The goal of the qualitative method is to ascertain how individuals understand a phenomenon (Valsaraj, 2021). This method includes an inductive analysis of the data to establish recurring themes, patterns, or ideas, followed by an explanation and interpretation of those categories (Nassaji, 2015). To understand the comments better provided by students regarding the lecturer's competence in online instruction, a qualitative research method is the most appropriate for this particular study. Through the eyes of study participants, qualitative research aims to explore the inner realm of perception and comprehend, characterize, and explain social processes. As opposed to generalisability, qualitative researchers often refer to "transferability" (from context to context). Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for abruptly shifting teaching and learning to an online platform, this study aims to comprehend the students' feedback when it comes to lecturer's online instruction competency. Fitria (2021) supports the above statement by saying qualitative research does not use statistics and numbers as part of its scientific gear; statistical tools are not used in qualitative research.

### 7.6 Findings

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The quantitative and qualitative findings are presented and analysed separately, then corroborated to determine a holistic perspective of students' online learning experiences based on the lecturer's competence. The quantitative findings are presented in Section A and the qualitative findings in Section B.

### 7.6.1. Section A: Students' quantitative responses based on a six-point Likert scale

The quantitative responses are based on a six-point Likert scale with the following descriptive labels: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Agree nor Disagree (NAD), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD), Average (AV). This will gauge in quantitative terms and average frequencies, the extent of student satisfaction with online instruction. All 47 students responded to items in this section. Before moving on, let's take a quick look at a few Likert scale constructional diversities. According to Joshi, Kale, Chandel and Pal (2015) the analytical handling and interpretation of Likert scales depend heavily on constructional diversities. Comparing symmetric and asymmetric Likert scale: This gives participants the freedom to select any response in a symmetric and balanced manner in either direction if the neutral/neutral position is precisely between the two extremes of strongly disagree (SD) and strongly agree (SA)

**Table 7.1: Students' responses to the lecturer's online instruction competence**

QN	Descriptive code	Response code					
		SA	A	NAD	D	SD	AV
1	Lecturer available for online instruction	72.3	23.4	2.2	0	0	48
2	Necessary online materials made available	53.3	38.3	0	0	0	46
3	Materials are interactive and interesting	60	32	4.3	0	0	46
4	Additional material is provided	40.4	40.4	15	0	0	40
5	Effective communication of changes	68.1	26	2.1	0	0	47
6	Flexible submission dates and platforms	60	23.4	9	4.3	0	42
7	The content accessible on e-Thuto	38.3	45	9	4.3	0	42



## CHAPTER 7

8	The lecturer is always prepared for class	55.3	36.2	2.1	0	0	46
9	Class sessions are properly organised	38.3	49	6.4	0	0	44
10	Assessment requirements are indicated	49	40.4	4.2	0	0	45
11	The lecturer motivates my interest in the course	38.3	38.3	4.3	6.4	0	38
12	The lecturer encourages question-asking	55.3	28	6.4	0	0	42
13	Opportunities for participation are given	47	36.2	9	0	0	42
14	The lecturer shows enthusiasm in the course	64	26	2.1	0	0	45
15	Independent thinking is encouraged	47	34	9	2.1	0	41
16	The lecturer is open to diverse viewpoints	49	26	15	2.1	0	38
17	Useful, constructive feedback is provided	31.2	28	19.2	3	0	30
18	Feedback on students' work is provided timely	36.2	43	11	2.1	0	40
19	The lecturer is willing to offer help	43	40.4	9	0	0	42
20	The lecturer is sensitive and concerned	32	43	15	0	0	38
21	The lecturer encourages high-quality work	53.2	30	6.4	0	0	42
22	The lecturer provides clear explanations	45	38.3	6.4	0	0	42

### 7.6.2. Section B: Students' qualitative responses based on narrative themes

The qualitative responses were based on open-ended brief answers to narrative codes about students' experiences of online learning. Some outstanding responses are quoted verbatim.

**Comment on the lecturer's remote teaching**

Twenty-seven out of 47 students responded. All 27 (100%) responses indicated that the lecturer's online remote teaching is effective. One student commented: 'The lecturer is always available in case the students need extra assistance. He announces on time when something gets posted on e-Thuto. He makes sure to explain all the work posted on e-Thuto.' Another student says, 'He has made remote learning a bit easier by not just giving out tasks but explaining the work with the use of recordings and providing materials such as slides, which provide the necessary information that is summarised.'

**Comment on the lecturer's teaching management**

Twenty-seven out of 47 students responded. All 27 (100%) responses confirmed that the lecturer's teaching management is diligent: from planning and preparation to execution. One student confirmed:

*The lecturer managed his teaching quite well; everything was always ready when it was time for class.*

Another one commented:

*The lecturer is always on time on the days when we are supposed to have lessons. He gives us enough time to complete assignments and understanding to students who have trouble submitting due to connectivity issues.*

**Comment on the lecturer's student engagement**

Twenty-six out of 47 students responded. All 26 (100%) responses were in consensus that the lecturer's engagement is commendable and above average.

One student said:

## CHAPTER 7

*In class and online, he doesn't only lecture us and that's it. We all talk, we all express our opinions, and he listens.*

One student remarked:

*The lecturer is always available to ensure that he is connected with his students and that they engage with the content and are on track. He provides feedback to students to let us know how we are doing. Should a student be left behind, the lecturer always reaches out to me either privately or through fellow students to ensure they catch up.*

### **Comment on the lecturer's support of student learning.**

Twenty-one out of 47 students responded. All 21 (100%) respondents agreed that the lecturer has done the best in supporting learners with materials and using channels he knows are best for them.

One student indicated:

*The lecturer is always available to answer any questions regarding the course work or assignments. He also provides extra study material for a student who is struggling with their work.*

Another student remarked:

*The lecturer sets a period of when he will be available to respond promptly to students' needs when he issues out an assignment or whatever task that is academically related. He keeps using tools he knows works best for his students and himself.*

### **What did the lecturer do to improve your learning?**

Twenty-three out of 47 students responded. All 23 (100%) responses concurred that the lecturer used various methods to improve their learning such as voice notes, slides, real-life examples, asking questions, giving challenging assignments, active group chats, pushing students, giving students reminders, and giving extra materials.

One student had this to say:

*He keeps the work simple with clear instructions such as when he expects our tasks to be done and handed in. This has helped with eliminating procrastination. The work is much easier to understand, not always but most of the time.*

Another student said:

*He posted extra study material on e-Thuto, so if I didn't understand something I always had extra material to refer to.*

### **What recommendations do you have for this lecturer to improve their teaching?**

Twenty-six out of 47 students responded. The following are the recommendations given, quoted verbatim:

*I would like our lecturer to open channels for students to help him with a few things in the form of SI the students can interact with other students to iron out matters which the lecturer may have not reached in the student's perspective.*

*To make remote learning more interactive, where we get opportunities to not just listen or read, but to actively process the information given in terms of quizzes and get immediate results. I believe this will help us absorb and remember the material easier.*

*The lecture must engage more with us in terms of how we have worked in a certain semester and in how we can put improvement into our work and into understanding what is being taught.*

*We would like to get feedback about how we wrote. And a clear indication of things we got wrong on tests.*

*Must allow students to express themselves more often.*

## CHAPTER 7

*Maybe get proper books or slides that are not full of words we can't even read properly.*

*But never put students in awkward positions whereby students will be afraid of attending their lessons... they must go easy on us.*

*Continue to be supportive to your students but not overwhelm them.*

### **7.7 Discussion and corroboration of findings**

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The findings that emerged from this study are organized about existing literature and real-world experiences, especially when compared to the achievements of competency in online training. One of the main goals of the study is to show how important it is for University of Technology lecturers to be proficient in online instruction. It is intended that this study will spark ideas for additional investigation, discussion, and action toward pertinent and concrete advancements in the area of online instruction competency. The two TAM categories of perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU) were used to discuss the findings. Perceived ease of use was discussed with reference to the lecturer's remote teaching and lecturer's teaching management. Under the category of Perceived Usefulness, findings were presented with reference to the lecturer's availability for online instruction and necessary online material being made available. The findings of this study support the Technology Acceptance Model's (TAM) Perceived Usefulness (PU) principle, showing that the degree to which technology was viewed as relevant and helpful in lecturers to be proficient in online instruction process determined how widely it was accepted by first-year students at the university of technology under investigation. According to Hoong, Thi and Lin (2017), perceived usefulness (PU) is defined as people's belief that using a particular tool will enhance their performance and, as such, "is the key determinant that emphatically influences users'

convictions and expectation to utilize the innovation.” Concerning the perceived usefulness, the lecturer’s availability for online instruction and online material being made available, the students cited that the lecturer was always available for remote teaching and the material provided was extremely useful. The degree to which a potential user believes an intervention or system to be effortless to use is known as perceived ease of use (PEOU) (Surendran, 2012). Concerning the perceived usefulness the lecturer’s availability for online instruction and online material being made available, the students cited that the lecturer was always available for remote teaching and that the material provided was extremely useful. Some studies have identified issues such as lack of lecturer preparation for online learning, constraints on learning facilities that are not fully ready and complete for students and technical obstacles such as the internet network that many students complain about during online learning (Kemp, Palmer & Strelan, 2019).

The responses are discussed in three categories of themes discovered in the data. The quantitative responses are significant in only two of the six-point Likert scale, SA and A; therefore the other scale weightings are ignored. The first category is planning and preparation. The lecturer’s availability for online instruction is significant (72.3% SA, 23.4% A), and so is the availability of necessary materials online (53.3% SA, 38.3%). The fact that some students agree, but not strongly, could be attributed to the fact that sometimes students receive the materials late due to connectivity issues. The consensus that materials are interactive and interesting is significant (60% SA, 32%). Perhaps this is an indication that there is still room for improvement.

These findings corroborate the responses from item 1 of the qualitative findings, confirming that the lecturer’s remote teaching is effective, and elaborating that the lecturer announces, posts, explains and summarises information timely and clearly. This finding reinforces

## CHAPTER 7

Yuhanna *et al.*'s (2020) assertion that materials that improve the program or course as a whole are available, such as emails for simple communication, and numerous software programs (such as WebCT and Black Board) that give lecturers and students simple access to educational materials and tools for effective online learning. In line with the current findings, Ametova and Mustafoeva's (2020) study indicates that 77% of lecturers at American and other foreign universities think that traditional education is sometimes surpassed by online education in terms of quality, and this could be the motivation for its wider adoption.

As to whether additional material is provided (40.4% SA, 40% A). These responses are fair, implying that more could be done to provide additional materials. A significant percentage of the responses (68.1% SA, 26% A) confirmed adequate communication of changes. Respondents confirmed that there are flexible submission dates and platforms (60% SA, 23.4% A). The finding on time flexibility is confirmed in item 2 of the qualitative findings, indicating that the lecturer considers students' challenges that delay submission. Krishnapatria (2020) points out that not every student in the class has access to equipment or technology tools such as laptops, desktop computers, and/or mobile phones that allow online learning.

However, it should be commended that at the institution of the current study, efforts were made to provide students with the necessary technological gadgets to enable online learning. The researcher's observation in this regard is that this purported lack of access to online instruction could be viewed as a manipulative tendency by some students considering their ongoing protests during the time of data collection. Nonetheless, to keep this online learning process running smoothly, lecturers and institutions must consider the relevance of student perception as a factor (Allo, 2020).

Content accessibility on e-Thuto and data flexibility was confirmed by (38% SA, and 45% A). This was a fair frequency. It could be surmised that connectivity issues and student protests delayed student access to learning materials. However, the respondents acknowledged that the lecturer provides materials using other channels than e-Thuto. Perhaps, students need more training to navigate e-Thuto, which is the institution's official learning management system.

The voices on whether the lecturer is always prepared for the class showed some slight reservations as well, with (55.3% SA) and (36.2% A). As already alluded to, this could have been a result of the general unrest of students going on in the study setting during the time of data collection. This contradicts the qualitative finding, in which most of the respondents indicated that the lecturer is very well prepared all the time, as in items 3 and 4 that asked them to comment on student engagement and learner support. The respondents confirmed that the lecturer actively engages the learners and allows them to voice their opinions and that the lecturer supports learners by providing extra materials and being there for them all the time. Perhaps Daniel's (2020) claims that the COVID-19 epidemic has affected students' lives in a variety of ways, based on their level and course of study as well as where they are in their programs could help explain the foregoing contradiction. Mafugu and Abel (2021) assert that lecturers should actively contribute to the construction of the reality of online instruction, and this can be possible through positive attitudes as noted in the current findings.

The second category is content delivery. The responses on whether class sessions are properly organised were not significant (38.3% SA) and (49% A). It could be surmised that the disturbances at the institution could have played a role, but there is room for improvement. There is a notable consensus that assessment requirements are indicated, with



## CHAPTER 7

(49% SA) and (40.4% A). On whether the lecturer motivates the student's interest in the content delivery, the frequencies were not that significant (38.3% SA) and (38.3% A). This could imply that more skills are required to make online learning more effective. As to whether the lecturer encouraged question asking, the responses were significant only to some extent (55.3% SA) and (28% A), implying that more could be done in that regard as well. Similarly, regarding the statement on whether opportunities for participation are given, the voices were significant to a certain extent (47% SA) and (36.2 % A).

It could be surmised that learners would have wanted to participate more than currently. The frequency of whether the lecturer showed enthusiasm in the module was significant (64% SA) and (26% A). However, the respondents' voices are not noticeably confident that independent thinking is encouraged (47% SA) and (34% A). Notably, much online education has relied on instructors distributing reading materials to students via email or putting information on Google Classroom, Moodle, or other learning management systems (Pete & Soko, 2020) and this limits interaction and feedback.

The quantitative frequencies are not in harmony with the qualitative responses given in item 3 in which they were required to comment on the lecturer's student engagement and all the respondents concurred that the lecturer is delivering the content exceptionally well. Importantly, it is commended that students are satisfied with content delivery in this module though there could be some areas for improvement.

On the contrary, in some contexts, research indicates that lecturers were unable to assist students with the necessary abilities to access the online learning platforms since there was no direct personal interaction and some lacked practical knowledge of digital technologies (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Less digitally competent lecturers and instructors were

consequently ill-prepared and/or under-equipped to handle complex computer and internet-related responsibilities. Mthethwa and Luthuli (2021) claim that academic personnel had difficulties because they lacked adequate training to use internet resources. Notably, in the current study context, training opportunities are adequate for learning instructors to handle online instruction.

The third category is student support from the lecturer. The frequency of whether the lecturer is open to diverse viewpoints is significant to some extent (49% SA) and (26% A). Perhaps the learners need to be given more opportunities to discuss their course. Regarding useful constructive feedback being provided (31.2% SA) and (38%). The slightly low frequencies could be because students might be having some reservations regarding the feedback they get. Concerning feedback on student work being provided timely, the frequencies were fair (36.2% SA) and (43% A). If there were some delays, they could have been caused by deferring assignment schedules and due dates made by the institution which made it difficult to stick to original schedules. Concerning the lecturer's willingness to offer help (43% SA and (40.4 % A) and are significant slightly. It implies that there is more room to support the students. The respondents' voices were not noticeably confident whether the lecturer was sensitive and concerned (32% SA) and (43% A). Because students could not attend all the sessions due to the general unrest during the data collection, it might have been difficult for them to evaluate this affective variable. The frequency of whether the lecturer encourages high-quality work was significant (53.2 SA) and (30% A). However, these frequencies are an indication that more can be done to improve the quality of work. Regarding whether the lecturer provides clear explanations (45% SA) and (38.3% A). This fair frequency points to the fact that explanations can be made clearer.

## CHAPTER 7

The quantitative responses are not in tandem with item 4 of Section B in which they commented on the lecturer's support of student learning, as well as in item 5 in which they commented on what the lecturer did to improve the student's learning. In both these items, the respondents confirmed that the lecturer was doing exceptionally well. Largely, these findings showing general satisfaction with online platforms disagree with other findings such as that by Raaper and Brown (2020) who note that students experienced considerable problems with routine and self-discipline, mental and physical welfare, study motivation, and feelings of loneliness as a result of the physical and social environment of universities disintegrating. However, it should be acknowledged that only 13% of the 47 students responded to Section B. Nonetheless, these voices should be used to map the future of instruction models. Hence Burns *et al.* (2020) state that it is crucial to introduce new and modified approaches to help students in their academic path post-COVID-19 better.

### 7.8 Conclusion

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The researcher concludes that generally, students are satisfied with the lecturer's competence in online instruction in the module evaluated. However, the findings reveal that there is more room for improvement in areas such as content delivery and student support as well as the general approach to online instruction. These findings boost confidence in migrating to online and blended learning platforms in the future. The fourth industrial and education revolutions call for digital skills and it is time for higher education institutions to develop economies such as South Africa, as the training hubs, to systematise and standardise online instruction.

## 7.9 Mapping the future

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The recommendations are drawn on item 6 of Section B (qualitative findings) in which students were requested to indicate how they expect the lecturer to improve on online instruction. It was recommended that extra help be enlisted from Supplemental Instruction leaders, senior students who can interact with other students to iron out matters which might not have been clear from the student's perspective. From the respondents' viewpoint, remote learning can be more interactive, by going beyond listening and reading, for example, to actively processing the information given in the form of online quizzes as this is believed to enhance absorbing and remembering learning content easier. Recapping and reflecting on previous work were other recommendations given to understand concepts and improve their learning. The respondents voiced that they need feedback on their performance and a clear indication of the content they got wrong in assessments. Another indication was that students must be allowed to express themselves more often. Acquiring proper books and providing slides that are simplified is another concern recommended. The respondents also indicated that they need to be supported and not overwhelmed. This implies more training and clear policies on online instruction as well as systematisation and standardisation of online instruction.

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## CHAPTER 8

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# Female students' perspectives on being included in curriculum transformation: a case study in a higher education institution

*Juanita Jonker*

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### Abstract

Drawing from a feminist theoretical lens to make its argument, the chapter explores the extent to which higher education curriculum transformation considers the needs of female students. To achieve its purposes, it reports on a selected group of female students' perspectives on curriculum transformation at a South African University of Technology. Thematic content analysis of documentary evidence was applied to analyse data qualitatively from the feminist theory perspective. Three themes emerged from data: power dynamics, social structures and knowledge production.

**Keywords:** curriculum transformation, feminist perspective, University of Technology, knowledge production.

## 8.1 Introduction

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In 2005, Barnett and Coate argued that the terminology “curriculum” is often excluded in higher education policy, in the UK as well as internationally. Since then, higher education literature exploded with studies on curriculum reform or transformation. Internationally, globalisation and internationalisation have been some of the key drivers of curriculum transformation (Watson, 2009). Other drivers include the worldwide shift to ‘knowledge-based economies’ and the ‘fourth industrial revolution’ that has led to national and institutional curriculum debates on how best to prepare graduates for a knowledge economy. A curriculum could also be transformed to address challenges at higher education institutions such as articulation gaps between secondary and higher education, equity in education delivery, employability matters, massification and lack of funding (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009). While these international challenges play a significant role locally, additional challenges in South African higher education are evident due to the country’s history.

Oppression has been a concern in South Africa's higher education system from as early as 1951 and females in general were excluded from higher education (Badat, 2010; Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021). The post-apartheid government of South Africa which became democratic in 1994, strived towards transformation in all aspects of the country, including higher education (CHE, 2000; Reddy, 2004). Nonetheless, despite the government's efforts to address inequalities and issues of social justice in higher education, the goal of transformation in higher education continues to remain ‘work-in-progress’ (Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021).

In the transformation processes, curriculum is an area that is often overlooked as most of the higher education transformation conversations in South Africa focus on counting numbers, increasing

## CHAPTER 8

access and democratic student intake (Ramathan, 2016). The definition of curriculum transformation in this context is based on the concept of ‘transform’ which refers to change and evolution (Du Preez, Simmonds & Verhoef, 2016), and the broad definition of curriculum as the totality of student experiences that occur in the educational process (Wiles, 2008). Globally, factors such as internationalisation and the shift towards ‘knowledge-based economies’ drive curriculum transformation. In the South African context, one of the main reasons for the curriculum to be reimaged (transformed) is the apartheid legacy of unequal educational provision that has resulted in a higher education system that failed the majority of its population (Shay, 2015). In this context, curriculum transformation is traditionally based on how academic developers and staff can reimagine the curriculum.

While all these foci on curriculum transformation are valid and urgent, this critiques this traditional curriculum approach and shares Quin’s (2019) view that curriculum design and redesign should include other stakeholders such as students and professionals. Therefore students who have previously been excluded should have the right to speak up and play an active role in curriculum transformation (Higgs, 2016; Lundy *et al.*, 2015; Marquis, 2016). Incorporating students’ perspectives in curriculum transformation will not only benefit the curriculum itself but will also aid in the pursuit of equity in higher education. This chapter thus responds to the calls by Quin (2019) to include the perspectives of students in curriculum transformation, and in the context of this chapter, female students.

More specifically, the chapter sought to shed new light on the perspectives of silenced female students’ voice on curriculum transformation conversations within a University of Technology (UoT) environment. The objectives of the study reported in this chapter were to examine the perspectives of a selected group of female students on

curriculum transformation at a UoT in South Africa, and to suggest a transformation framework from a feminist point of view.

## 8.2 Conceptual framework

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The chapter is written from a feminist angle but will not make any new additions to the present feminist ideas of transformation in higher education. Rather, the goal of the feminist angle is social transformation. Social transformation in this context aims at a shift in the collective consciousness of society towards the important perspectives of women, more specifically female students. Therefore the feminist principles adopted in the research offer an opportunity for previously excluded females to provide their perspectives from lived realities (Salo & Mama, 2001). Various definitions of feminism exist, while the chapter is written in context from one overarching definition.

The definition that this chapter is based upon, is feminism as Salo and Mama (2001) describe the meaning and function thereof. Their description of feminism is indicative of the “refusal of oppression, and commitment to struggling for women’s freedom from all forms of oppression – internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical.” Feminist scholars argue for this act of refusal to be the centre of the transformation of higher education institutions and the pedagogical environment (Elenes, 1995; Prah & Maggott, 2020; Safarik, 2003). The current chapter agrees with these scholars and argues for female voices to be heard within the higher education transformation arena.

In research, feminist approaches exist that are defined and applied in various ways. The current chapter adopted a feminist standpoint theory approach. During the 1970s this feminist standpoint theory arose from the Marxist feminist and feminist critical theoretical approaches. The

## CHAPTER 8

approach offers epistemological and methodological approaches in various fields of study with a common goal to acknowledge, analyse and draw on power relationships, as well as bring about change in societies. Various feminist scholars, such as Smith, Hartsock, Rose and Harding, have argued for using the lived experiences of women as the starting point of scientific enquiry (Harding, 2004).

The feminist standpoint theory is both descriptive and prescriptive, describing and analysing the underlying effects of power structures on knowledge while arguing a specific course of investigation. The course of investigation commences from viewpoints that emerged from the struggle within the lives of marginalised groups. As a result, the feminist standpoint theory includes the following principles: knowledge has a social context; due to the social position marginalised groups are more aware of things and raise questions different from non-marginalised groups; and research should be started with the lives of the marginalised, especially power relations research (Bowell, 2010; Gurung, 2020). Therefore the theory theorizes that women, particularly those from marginalised groups, have unique insights into power dynamics, social structures, and knowledge production due to their distinct positions within society. As a result, the chapter investigates a selected group of females, previously marginalised, to gain knowledge on their perspective of curriculum transformation with specific reference to the three themes emerging from the theory: 1) power dynamics, 2) social structures and 3) knowledge production.

### 8.3 Literature review

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In 1994, South Africa reached a milestone which was the turning point of an era of a colonial and apartheid-driven country. Oppression, from as early as the 1950s, has probably been the strongest driver in the strive towards a new South Africa. During the era of the colonial and

apartheid-driven South Africa, the country was dominated by a White, male system (Badat, 2010; Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021). The system affected all aspects of society as individuals of colour and females were oppressed in many areas, including higher education. The new democratic government of South Africa strives towards transformation in all aspects of the country, as well as in higher education (CHE, 2000; Reddy, 2004).

Transformation can be defined as “a complete change in the appearance or character of something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). Within the South African context, transformation relates to societal change aiming at both overcoming the colonial apartheid era and addressing technological and environmental change with goals that include more job creation, economic improvement, gender and racial equity and social inclusivity (Musonda *et al.*, 2019; UNESCO, 2017; South African Government, 2019). Higher education is a key role player in this societal change. The transformation of higher education thus is crucial for the success of a transformative process and societal change (Harvey & Knight, 1996).

In 1996 the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) reviewed the higher education sector in the light of the post-apartheid era (DoE, 1996). The report from the review highlighted two main challenges in higher education to be addressed by transformation. Firstly, the historical fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency need transformation using increasing access to Black students and women. Consequently, such an increase in access will necessitate a change in teaching and learning models to accommodate the larger and more diverse student population. The second challenge is to transform higher education to meet the needs of the increasingly technologically oriented economy. The first challenge is one of the drivers of the current

## CHAPTER 8

chapter that focuses on women, who previously did not have access to higher education.

The government documents published proposed a policy framework to drive the transformation process amongst higher education institutions. The policy framework can be categorized into three focus areas, namely participation, responsiveness and cooperation and partnerships. Each of these focus areas is aimed at overcoming the two challenges identified during the higher education review. Participation is aimed at overcoming fragmentation, inequality and efficiency. Responsiveness includes accountability and relates to the needs of the technological economy and society. Lastly, cooperation and partnerships emphasize cooperation and partnerships in governance structures and operations of higher education. The cooperation and partnerships aim to optimize the use of scarce resources and increase funding (Cloete & Muller, 1998; Reddy, 2004). The chapter affords female students the opportunity of participating in the transformation process of the specific institution and, as a result, respond to the participation focus area of the policy framework.

The South African higher education policy frameworks were comprehensive but not flawless (Badat, 2010). International and national experts raised concerns about the transformation documents that included limited information on implementation, lack of coherent philosophy of education, limited guidelines on curriculum development and marginalizing and excluding some stakeholders, including women (Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021; Reddy, 2004; Saltzburg Seminar, 1996). Moreover, the #MustFall movement which sought to increase higher education access to marginalised groups (BBC News, 2019), also highlighted the lack of African identity in the education philosophy, curriculum and content, in line with the concerns raised by experts (Jansen, 2009; Lange, 2012). The similar concerns from experts and

students alike may be indicative that students, despite often being excluded, can make valuable contributions towards higher education's transformation.

In addition to the concerns with higher education transformation and access the #MustFall movements also mirrored the intense need of students to have a voice and be included (Lange, 2017). The South African Higher Education institutions focused on the government's policy frameworks and unintentionally silenced the students in the endeavours towards transformation, while it is envisaged that the government policy frameworks were developed in consultation with students as active partners. Similarly, students were also excluded in other specific processes of higher education such as curriculum transformation. Curriculum transformation mainly involved academic developers and staff, while critiques such as Reddy (2004) indicated that some stakeholders were excluded in South Africa's higher education transformation policies and processes. Quin (2019) questions the curriculum redesign being the sole responsibility of academic staff and argues for the involvement of all stakeholders, including students.

Based on the discussion above, the chapter argues for a more inclusive curriculum transformation process where students' voices are appreciated. In support of this argument are scholars such as Higgs (2016), Lundy *et al.* (2015), Marquis (2016), Moletsane (2012) and Quin (2019). The notion of the research that incorporates students' perspectives in curriculum transformation will not only benefit the curricula at the specific institution but will contribute to South African higher education's pursuit to eliminate inequalities.

In addition to the exclusion of students in higher education transformation, females specifically are also often excluded. The inequalities in higher education before 1994, did not only affect individuals of colour but predominantly females. This oppression and



## CHAPTER 8

marginalization of females has not yet changed substantially, despite the mentioned progress by the South African policies and procedures for higher education transformation (Akala & Divala, 2016; Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021). At a recent higher education transformation summit the South African deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Prof. Mkhize, highlighted how shameful it is that patriarchy is still suppressing the rights of women. She reasoned: “We need to go back to basics and think very deeply about the empowerment of women”. Similarly, various scholars argue for the inclusion of previously silenced women in the transformation of higher education (Badat, 2010). Therefore the chapter focused not only on the perspectives of students but particularly on those of female students. The perspectives were analysed through a feminist lens, as the chapter supports the viewpoint of Praha and Maggott (2020) that the feminist theory possesses restorative potential within curriculum transformation.

The feminist standpoint theory that underpins the chapter is said to offer both epistemological and methodological approaches. The theory thus not only informs the knowledge production and needed change in society, but also informs the methodology of the chapter. Aligned with the principles of the standpoint theory: research, particularly power relations research, should begin with the lives of the marginalised (Bowell, 2010) which in this case is the female students.

Further motivation for the inclusion of females only is to prevent bias. Historically, White male researchers claimed their research to be objective, unbiased, and factual. On the contrary, feminists believe that an unconscious bias may exist that may influence the claimed neutral research process and often result in skewed results. It is seldom that the distinctive experiences of different genders are explored (Jenkins, Narayanaswamy & Sweetman, 2019). The chapter commences with

investigating females as an oppressed group from where further research can be conducted among males to explore distinctive and different perspectives between the two genders. This notion is aligned with the feminist theory that suggests the process of investigation should commence from the information that emerged from the struggle within the lives of marginalised groups (Bowell, 2010).

## 8.4 Methodology

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Two short research questions underpin the chapter: Firstly, what are the perspectives of selected female students regarding curriculum transformation, with specific reference to power dynamics, social structures and knowledge production? Secondly, what will a curriculum transformation framework look like from a feminist standpoint theory stance? Various research methods were considered, and the following methodology was deemed fit for answering the two research questions.

**Aim:** To examine the perspectives of a selected group of female students on their involvement and needs in curriculum transformation at a UoT in South Africa and to suggest a transformation framework from a feminist standpoint stance.

**Objectives:** The four objectives of this study were:

- To investigate female students' perspective on curriculum transformation with specific reference to power dynamics and inclusivity.
- To assess female students' perspective on curriculum transformation with specific reference to social structures and their position within them.
- To explore female students' perspective on knowledge production and their specific needs.

## CHAPTER 8

- To propose a transformation framework based on female students' perspectives from a feminist point of view.

### **8.4.1. Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval was not necessary as secondary data was utilised for this chapter, although basic principles of ethics (including anonymity, beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, justice and fidelity) were adhered to throughout the research. The secondary data were anonymised, and no participant was identifiable from the reports and transcriptions. Moreover, the original data's consent and usage permissions were not violated. The ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence were high priority in the current research where the participants were not merely protected from harm, but where the purpose and suggestions included in the chapter was aimed at benefiting and improving the welfare of the participants together with other female students. The participants voluntarily participated in the discussions which was aligned to autonomy as ethical principle. The research adhered to principles of justice and fidelity and participants were not remunerated or harmed during their involvement in the discussions.

### **8.4.2. Study design and setting**

The chapter is based on a qualitative, descriptive study design as described by Clarke and Braun (2017). Secondary data in the form of reports and focus group discussion recordings collected by the curriculum development unit of the specific university of technology was utilised. The nature of data collected by the curriculum department was based on a qualitative research approach, which also forms the basis of this chapter. The objective of the curriculum units' endeavour was to explore the perspectives of students regarding the possibility of

being included in curriculum transformation as well as curriculum transformations that the students desired.

Qualitative research methods are based on an understanding of the significance of subjective meaning, which can be brought to research by individual participants and is mindful of their reality's social construction (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Furthermore, a qualitative research approach explores participants' views and experiences concerning their context in a way that captures their voices (Creswell, 2014). In response, Jenkins, Narayanaswamy and Sweetman (2019) suggested that qualitative research methods with the ability to generate rich data are ideal for investigating human experiences unbiased and allow the researcher to develop an understanding of the typical experience of a specific group, for instance females. Given the objective of understanding female students' personal and individual perspectives on curriculum transformation at the higher education institution where they are studying, this approach was deemed most appropriate. Due to the researcher selecting specific data from two “female only” focus groups, this chapter has a case study nature.

### **8.4.3. Study population and sampling**

The secondary data utilized were purposively selected to include interviews and reports from two specific “female-only” focus groups. This target population represented a sample of students from a single program within the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences. The secondary data reflected in this chapter included data from two focus group interviews with a total of fifteen female students who participated in the focus group discussions.

### **8.4.4. Recruitment and data collection**

An invitation comprising the information letter, consent form and draft interview schedule was electronically emailed by the curriculum development unit to the specific institutions' community of practice members. The members are situated in different positions of employment and within different departments. However, most focus group interviews were conducted by academics with whom the students are familiar and comfortable. Interviewers, mainly academics, distributed the information to students and invited them to participate in a 30-minute focus group interview during a free period. Those who were willing were then allowed to participate in the focus group discussions. A semi-structured discussion guide was used to guide the data collection process. The interview schedule comprised key points on the possibility of being part of the institution's curriculum transformation, as well as suggested types of transformations of the curriculum being sought by participants. Participants were informed about the key definitions of "curriculum, transformation and curriculum transformation" and were then requested to share their perspectives on being included in the process of curriculum transformation and transformations that they felt were necessary at the specific UoT. In addition, they were invited to share their concerns related to the transformation of curriculum, and how they see a transformed institution in future. Semi-structured discussions are "knowledge-producing conversations" (Hesse-Biber, 2017) in which the openness of the discussion will enable the participants to move the conversation in a direction that is personal, while simultaneously creating a boundary for the researcher to pursue information related to the research questions. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed from where data were analysed and then compiled into reports. These anonymised transcriptions and reports were utilized to compile this chapter.

### 8.4.5. Data analysis

The qualitative descriptive research process of the chapter was underpinned by content and thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017, Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, the feminist standpoint theory (Bowell, 2010; Gurung, 2020) provides the language to define, describe and interpret the findings.

The thematic analysis will thus assist in initially identifying, analysing and organising themes from the data (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the three themes from the feminist standpoint theory will guide further analysis, as well as discussion and interpretation of findings. The three themes represent the three areas, according to the feminist standpoint theory, that women from marginalised groups have unique insight into 1) power dynamics, 2) social structures, and 3) knowledge production.

## 8.5 Results

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In response to the first research question regarding what the perspectives of selected female students are regarding curriculum transformation, with specific reference to power dynamics, social structures and knowledge production, findings indicated that female students felt they were not included. To include them and in response to the second research question, the curriculum transformation process must focus on the skills development of female students through extracurricular short courses or coping skills. This is intended to empower them to become involved and also to ensure the transformation caters for their needs as a previously disadvantaged group. Furthermore, curriculum transformation should enable a transformed curriculum that is focused on improving the self-confidence of female students taking into consideration their current challenges. Lastly, curriculum transformation should promote open

## CHAPTER 8

communication, especially for female students. A discussion on the four themes follows.

### 8.6 Discussion

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The following five subthemes emerged within the three themes from the findings: representation and self-confidence (power dynamics); communication and support (social structures); and skills development (knowledge production).

#### 8.6.1. Theme 1: Power dynamics

##### Representation

In line with Akala and Divala (2016), Meela, Libhaber and Kramer's (2021) argument that attention should still be paid to the marginalization and oppression of females in higher education, participants also identified 'representation and support' as one of the key challenges as they feel not represented in curriculum transformation initiatives. The discussions related to this theme were on the need to be heard and represented by an authoritative person or group. The students felt excluded, which is one of the signs of gender discrimination (Villine, 2021) and which supports claims that equity in higher education has not completely reached its goals as per the country's transformation policy framework (Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021; Reddy, 2004). The students uttered the feeling of exclusion with strong statements such as:

*We want to be included!*

*Where everyone will be accommodated...*

## Self-confidence

Theme one relates to self-confidence, which was a theme that emerged directly from discussion, but also which may be a result of some of the other mentioned themes. Themes that may be a result of the identified poor self-confidence are extracurricular short courses and coping skills. Students felt a need for a transformed curriculum that would improve their self-confidence in both their studies and their workplace (experiential learning and/or part-time employment). The need for self-confidence may also relate to the scars of being part of the often marginalised and oppressed South African women. Self-image and self-esteem are related to self-confidence and may result in creating barriers to one's performance (Benabou & Tirole, 2000). Therefore students with maintained self-confidence may result in better-performing students with an improved quality of life. Due to the negative influence of the other themes on self-confidence, a transformed curriculum that attends to influencing themes may result in an improved confidence level of students. In turn, self-confident females may also be able to resist oppression. Some discussions on the theme of self-confidence follow:

*When you go and work you are nervous*

*You don't know if you are doing it right*

*We don't dare to tell support what's wrong*

### 8.6.2. Theme 2: Social structures

#### Support

Female students sensed a need to be supported financially, as well as with other aspects of their lives and studies. They acknowledge the current systems at the specific UoT in place but feel that these still do not meet all their needs. Suggestions included improved



## CHAPTER 8

communication from the systems (services) on campus and more representatives of their calibre whom they do not feel intimidated to approach. The intimidated feeling of the students may be indicative of feelings of unimportance and inferiority which relates to gender discrimination. Gender discrimination with such feelings is a source of stress (Villine, 2021), which was evident from later discussions (refer to coping skills). This type of discrimination stands in direct contrast with feminist theories. Some of the extracts of these discussions follow:

*We need someone where we can raise our concerns, not only subject concerns but in general...*

*Only in the first year there's someone, then the second and third year, there's no one*

*Students need more support*

*We need actual people from our departments where we can go to them and tell us as course\* students, this is what we need*

*Most of the 1<sup>st</sup>=years are scared of the student representatives\*, for real, so we won't go to the student representatives\* to tell them what's wrong but if we could have a representative from the course\* departments then she can represent us and tell the student representatives\* what our concerns are*

### **Improved Communication**

Similar to self-confidence, improved communication is a theme that emerged directly from the focus group discussions but also concerns other identified themes. Female students believed a transformed curriculum should be based on open and clear communication. Themes that are integrated with improved communication are self-confidence representation and support. Students with poor self-confidence also voiced a feeling of intimidation by certain support systems and student

representatives. This results in the female students not being able to voice their concerns and in turn communication is influenced negatively. Furthermore, should representatives and support systems improve their communication with students, such students may be better informed about the support availability. Pre-1994, previously marginalised and oppressed groups experienced poor communication in the sense that they could not voice their concerns. Transformation initiatives of South Africa have been attending to this matter, for example, the higher education transformation policy framework that aims to increase equity. However, as mentioned earlier this goal is far from reached and female students may still be oppressed in certain manners (Akala & Divala, 2016; Meela, Libhaber & Kramer, 2021; Reddy, 2004). Even such less obvious oppression of females is directly against all feminist beliefs and principles. Pleads for better communication included:

*We want to know what we did wrong.*

*Better communication... we are not always aware of these things.*

### **8.6.3. Theme 3: Knowledge production**

#### **Skills development**

The third theme that emerged from discussions among the female students was curriculum transformation that includes more skills development. Two sub-themes emerged under the third theme, which includes extracurricular short courses and coping skills. These two theories link well with the 1<sup>st</sup> principle of feminism standpoint theory. Female students experienced a need for the mentioned skills due to their social context. Empowering female students in this way may assist in repositioning females within their social context.

## CHAPTER 8

### **Extracurricular short courses**

The female students experience a hunger for skills development. Despite them being enrolled for a formal qualification, they suggested transformation to attend to their need for more skills in the form of extracurricular courses. The type of short learning courses sought by the students do exist at the specific UoT. However, the students felt a need for more such opportunities. The related discussions included:

*We want like an extra course.*

*Like I'm studying a course\* but I'm doing a short course in marketing or entrepreneurship.*

*Like I'm studying course\* but I'm doing a short course for manicures also.*

Post-apartheid the government of South Africa did not only aim for equity amongst individuals of colour, but also gender equity. As men mainly dominated the higher education milieu, special efforts were made to empower women, such as the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS). While much progress has been made with the NSDS to empower women (Van der Byl, 2014), it was clear from the focus group discussions that female students felt a need for additional skills development.

Skills development has various benefits to women, ranging from self-sustainability to self-efficacy. In turn, a reduction of stressors may be experienced as associated benefits such as improved quality of life, a sense of purpose and self-confidence in society (Harley *et al.*, 2018). The lack of self-confidence is discussed in this chapter under theme 1.

### **Coping skills**

The second subtheme of skills development and aspect to be covered by curriculum transformation according to participants were: coping

skills to deal with stress and emotional matters. Various matters have been identified by female students that contribute to the stress they experience, e.g. financial strains and funding issues, as well as assessments and academic pressures, as per discussions below. Other factors that contribute to their stress as per theme two the lack of support and theme two the poor communication. Some factors not mentioned by students but evident to influence the stress levels of especially female students are gender discrimination, unplanned pregnancies and social responsibilities such as caretaking (Moletsane, 2012; Van der Byl, 2014; Villine, 2021). The students voiced their need for a transformed curriculum that provides them with coping skills that will be able to alleviate stress and improve their quality of life together with academic performance and self-confidence (refer to theme 1). In support of the need for coping skills, participants stated:

*It's the whole pressure, the whole academic pressure and it's a lot to take in.*

*Support\* tell you to come back in the next two days, what if in the next two days, I am not here anymore?*

*You don't know if your funding is paid, and your landlord cuts your water and electricity.*

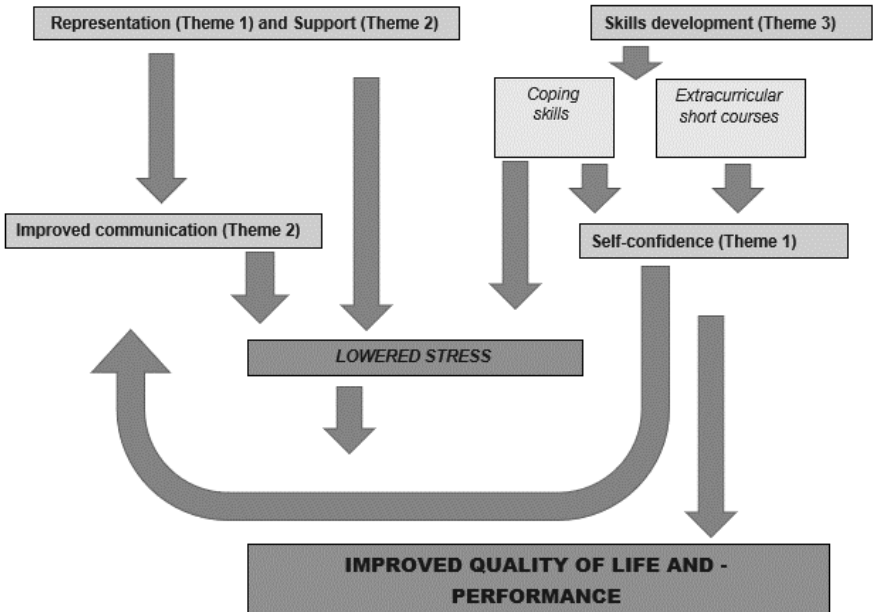
*We are worried about the systems and also assessments.*

*...most students go through a lot and many of them don't have the comfort or willingness to go to the support\*...*

*We all need to attend a course on how to deal with stress because that's gonna help us be better in school.*

#### **8.6.4. A transformed curriculum framework from a feminist standpoint**

Considering the three themes (power dynamics, social structures and knowledge production) along with subthemes, a figure of interaction and results has been constructed (figure 1). This figure aims to address the second research question: What would a curriculum transformation framework look like from a feminist standpoint theory perspective? This figure illustrates the suggested transformation framework of higher education based on female students' perspectives and feminist standpoint theory. Moreover, the interaction of suggested transformations with each other is also visualized in the figure. The two main results from the suggested transformation framework, in terms of a curriculum transformation process that is accommodating of the needs of female students, will be lowered stress with improved quality of life (happier) and improved performance. The mentioned results will have a ripple effect not only on higher education but also on the larger society and may reach as far as an improved economy. This effect is aligned with the objectives of the higher education transformation policy framework of South Africa, especially towards equity of women in higher education and supporting feminist theories (Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation, 1996; Reddy, 2004).



**Figure 8.1: Suggested higher education curriculum transformation framework from a feminist standpoint**

In addition to equity of women, women empowerment is central to this framework. Most of the suggested transformations suggested in the framework contribute towards the empowerment of women, namely the representation of female students, skills development, and improved self-confidence. Women empowerment as discussed here is also a goal of the South African government's transformation initiatives (Van der Byl, 2014), as well as feminism theories; therefore motivating the applicability of the suggested framework for higher education institutions in South Africa. In addition to the benefits of the suggested framework to higher education and the South African government, the benefit of females should remain a focus of the transformation process.

## CHAPTER 8

Finally, by viewing the suggested framework (figure 1) through the lens of feminism the following findings were made. Three insights according to the feminist standpoint theory (Bowell, 2010; Gurung, 2020) were explored among female students and included in the suggested framework. Furthermore, considering the definition and function of feminism (Salo & Mama, 2001) the following forms of oppression are related to the suggested transformations: psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and moral. Psychological and emotional factors emerged in discussions on representation and support, coping skills and self-confidence. Moreover, the foreseen result of improved quality of life also relates to the psychological and emotional aspects of feminism. Similarly, socio-economic factors are included in the framework as another foreseen result of the suggested framework, namely improved performance. Lastly, the political and ethical aspects concerning the suggested transformations have been discussed in the previous paragraphs in alignment with government initiatives and goals.

### 8.7 Conclusion

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The objectives of the chapter were met and the perspectives of the selected group of female students on curriculum transformation were discussed and utilized to suggest a transformation. It was evident that female students wanted to be part of the curriculum transformation process and longed for their voices to be heard and their needs to be met. Moreover, the female students felt a need for a transformed curriculum that would empower them, both emotionally and physically.

The perspectives of the female students in terms of how to be included and how their needs can be accommodated in the curriculum transformation process were aligned with three themes from the feminist standpoint theory and included the need for being represented and supported, skills development, self-confidence and improved

communication. These findings within the three themes were found to be interrelated and to aim collectively towards reduction of stress, improved quality of life and improved performance. As evident from the literature review, as well as the findings of the study, the gender equity goals of the post-apartheid initiatives have not been completely met. Moreover, the findings were aligned with the transformation goals of the government, as well as the definition and function of feminism. A framework for curriculum transformation from a feminist standpoint was proposed based on female students' perspectives. The framework serves as a point of departure to challenge traditional curriculum approaches and include not only student perspectives but specifically female student perspectives as a previously oppressed group. Hence further research on the perspectives of female students on curriculum transformation is proposed, specifically relating to power dynamics and their inclusion, social structures and their position, knowledge production and skills.

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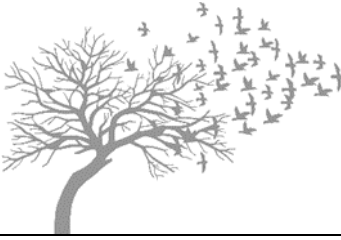
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## CHAPTER 9

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### Research impact at South African UoTs: stepwise cognitive progression in applied doctoral pedagogy

*Hesta Friedrich-Nel and Ryk Lues*

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#### **Abstract**

The societal impact of new knowledge and the role of Universities of Technology (UoTs) in its generation is the focus of this chapter. It argues that while the roles of UoTs have become more complex, the guiding principles for postgraduate education knowledge generation role has remained rooted in ‘classical university’ pedagogy. The concern of the chapter is that in developing economies there is a growing debate on the relevance of ‘traditional knowledge creation’ versus ‘practical applications’ knowledge creation. By applying the concept of ‘permeable universities’ to make its point, the chapter examines whether UoTs in South Africa have fully embraced the need to revise and reshape their doctoral pedagogies to generate knowledge relevant to their immediate societal contexts.

**Keywords:** Higher education, universities of technology, cognitive progression, graduate attributes, doctoral pedagogy

## 9.1 Introduction

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Doctoral graduates play an important role in advancing research and innovation (Baptista, Frick, Holley, Remmik, Tesch & Åkerlind, 2015). As such, academic institutions, industries, and research organisations prefer candidates with a doctoral degree, specifically to lead innovative research projects. It is assumed that these candidates possess attributes, skills, and competencies, such as creativity and innovation that make them attractive to the work environment (Van Schalkwyk, Van Lill & Cloete, 2021). Inevitably, the government sector is looking for graduates in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields to drive their policies and specific initiatives.

The demand for more doctoral graduates in South Africa stems from the National Development Plan (NDP, 2011), which has prioritised an increase in doctoral graduates aiming to reach 5,000 by 2020. This drive is spearheaded by the contribution of doctoral graduates to the knowledge economy, to boost research and develop higher-order skills, as well as to renew the aging professoriate in South Africa (Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard, 2016). Understandably, academic institutions prefer candidates with a doctoral degree for their contribution to the fitness of and fitness for purpose, as well as to add to the bigger picture in higher education, namely research, teaching, and community engagement. Doctoral candidates are therefore favoured for their academic leadership and potential contribution to global research initiatives, collaboration and partnerships, and for contributing to socio-economic wellbeing. By introducing quality doctoral graduates into society, constitutes a pivotal element of achieving permeability – defined as “...an approach, a method for the redevelopment of the higher education environment, a way of doing which institutions, governing bodies and sector organisations can use to re-find purpose and values, to educate, to research and to engage more widely...” (The

Permeable University: The purpose of universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - A Manifesto (University of Lincoln, Bayford Pool, Lincoln). Permeability has been given momentum through an increasing focus on participatory and action-oriented research methodologies. For example, doctoral researchers at technological institutions in particular, have been engaging with communities and stakeholders to co-create knowledge and address real-world predicaments.

In addition to their knowledge contribution, doctoral candidates have through millennia been sought after by society for their attributes (Tshuma & Bitzer, 2023). One of these attributes is academic writing, specifically writing proposals for new research and funding. In addition, there is mention of communication, critical thinking, innovation, and problem-solving. In section 5 below, we further explore these attributes. As such, critique of the traditional doctoral pedagogy and the need for transformation is spearheaded by the assumed misalignment of the current basic research completed at the Universities of Technology (UoTs). This misalignment points to the attributes of doctoral graduates and the response of research outcomes to address societal demands.

After offering the rationale and research methodology, this study presents a backdrop to the higher education landscape in South Africa, and its historical legacies and complexities are provided. The expectations of doctoral graduates are viewed through the lenses of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) level descriptors and Bloom's Taxonomy. Recommendations regarding the limitations of doctoral graduates' scientific knowledge, skills, and attributes are based on the Council on Higher Education (CHE) report on doctoral education (CHE, 2022). Based on design thinking methodology, a systematic approach to instil cognitive progression toward applied doctoral pedagogy is proposed. The intended outcome is a refocus, transformation, and application of research findings to enhance



## CHAPTER 9

scientific knowledge, skills, and doctoral attributes, specifically at a University of Technology (UoT). Ultimately, the chapter aims to contribute to societal challenges through high-quality applied research that culminates into innovative and tangible outcomes and products. The critical theory research paradigm was used as the theoretical lens (Asghar, 2013) as this research paradigm drives social change through rigorous scientific inquiry. Critical theorists scrutinise knowledge and methodologies, recognising the influence and potential power phenomena or systems under investigation. Through critical theory, the actors and those who have agency to enable change are identified.

It is against this setting that this chapter engages four primary components: Firstly, it starts by discussing the rationale for the study; the chapter then describes the UoT concept and mandate, it explores and dissects various components of doctoral pedagogy and associated curricula to guide the doctoral pedagogy transformation. Finally, it concludes by proposing innovative interventions to enhance and facilitate applied research outcomes.

### **9.1.1. From ideation to applied outcome**

South Africa is increasingly experiencing an array of societal and economic challenges whereas research endeavours at current research entities are not adequately responsive to such needs. In the University World News 2023, Ben Daniel listed some of the issues and expressed the need for research methodology to be more innovative. As such, and in line with the CHE doctoral review recommendations (CHE, 2022), the chapter aims to propose a pedagogy that facilitates the value chain from idea to applied outcome, is responsive to the developmental context, and specifically articulates the mandate of South African UoTs. To capture the complex and holistic nature of the applied doctoral pedagogy process that could potentially address the range of skills required of doctoral students, the ‘twin’ concepts of design and action

linked to doctoral pedagogy are referred to in this chapter (Danby & Lee, 2012:5). Danby and Lee (2012) argue that this pedagogy aligns with formulating ideas and translating them into practice. As such, to illustrate the actions, making connections, and responding to the social context of doctoral pedagogy, these authors refer to it as ‘pedagogy-in-action’ (Danby & Lee 2012:7).

While basic research is fundamental to scientific progress and understanding, acknowledging its shortfalls is key to fostering a balanced and effective research landscape. Balancing the pursuit of knowledge with practical applications, ethical implications, and effective communication is essential for ensuring that basic research continues to contribute meaningfully to a collective understanding of the world. The nuanced role that basic research plays in the broader scientific endeavour should be appreciated, and pave the way for responsive, innovative, and impactful research endeavours. The above-mentioned broad backdrop exposes an obvious elephant in the room: How do UoTs respond to this predicament in terms of its doctoral pedagogy, as principal enablers of the process, specifically, when dissecting the components of applied doctoral pedagogy as an enabler of the scientific method?

The fundamental research question guiding the chapter is articulated as follows: What are the desired and unique attributes required by doctoral graduates that exit in Universities of Technology, and what strategies should be implemented to achieve such attributes? This overarching question permeates into the following aims:

- to delineate the desired traits, attributes, and competencies that should be instilled in doctoral graduates to unlock the students’ agency in terms of societal responsiveness, social justice, and decolonisation;

## CHAPTER 9

- to identify tangible enablers UoTs should implement to reshape and transform doctoral pedagogy;
- to conceptualise tangible strategies that UoTs should implement to realise the reshaped doctoral pedagogy in enabling the desired traits and attributes such as innovation and creativity; and
- to consider and propose cognitive progression as a mechanism to ensure the effectiveness of applied and responsive research outcomes.

### 9.2 Research design

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A qualitative approach, desktop analysis, and critical literature survey methodology were used in extracting information from purposeful and targeted literature on doctoral pedagogy and doctoral education. The following steps guided the authors: A critical literature survey methodology was followed to extract and interpret information from the literature. Specific skills and attributes to be instilled in doctoral graduates were identified using design thinking methodology. The verbs based on Bloom's taxonomy were critiqued to enable responsive actions. Against the backdrop of existing basic and applied practices, and leaning on design thinking methodology, tangible initiatives, procedures, and guidelines are proposed to enable innovative doctoral pedagogy as a mechanism to achieve permeability. Stepwise cognitive progression is proposed as a novel approach to facilitate applied research outcomes and unlock doctoral graduates' agency.

#### 9.2.1. Critical literature survey methodology

The critical literature survey methodology was selected for this chapter, based on various considerations. The methodology of conducting a critical literature survey stands as a fundamental aspect of academic

research, providing a systematic approach to comprehend existing knowledge, pinpoint gaps, and guide further investigations. It serves as a pivotal initial stage in research endeavours across various fields, aiding researchers in navigating the extensive realm of scholarly literature. One of the strengths of this methodology is that it encourages reflexivity while also rendering a more subjective and evaluative approach. The critical review approach was further deemed appropriate by being less structured, allowing for a more nuanced interpretation of the findings. This section explores the essence of critical literature survey methodology, elucidating its importance, essential components, and recommended practices (Farrukh & Sajjad, 2023).

A critical literature survey involves an assessment of scholarly contributions and existing literature pertinent to providing a deeper understanding of a specific research topic, in this case, cognitive progression in applied doctoral pedagogy. It lays the groundwork for informed decision-making, allowing researchers to position their work within a broader intellectual discourse. By engaging with diverse perspectives, theories, and methodologies, the authors gleaned insights that shaped their conceptual frameworks. Although the limitation of this methodology is subjectivity, it may be difficult to repeat and there is a potentially narrow view of existing literature (Chukwuere, 2023) it assisted the authors in documenting the research landscape, innovations, and limitations, related to higher education, specifically UoTs.

The initial phase of the critical literature review process entailed identifying relevant sources of information, including academic journals, books, conference proceedings, dissertations, and other scholarly publications. Utilising advanced search techniques such as database queries and citation tracking facilitates comprehensive literature retrieval. Search engines such as EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect, and Google

## CHAPTER 9

Scholar were accessed via the university's library portal to search for publications in English. Amongst others, keywords, Boolean operators and algorithms via the Google Scholar and Science Direct platforms, such as: 'doctoral education'; 'doctoral pedagogy', 'cognitive progression', 'graduate attributes' and 'creativity and innovation' were used. No specific time frame was linked to the search. The crux of the literature survey methodology lies in the critical evaluation of collected literature. The authors scrutinised the quality, relevance, and credibility of each source, considering factors such as author credentials, publication venue, methodology, and theoretical foundations. Frameworks such as the Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose (CRAAP) test aided in assessing the trustworthiness of literature (Central Michigan University Libraries, 2023).

Synthesising diverse viewpoints and findings from the literature was paramount in fostering a defined understanding of the UoT research landscape. The contextual framework, underpinned by existing studies within the broader socio-cultural, historical, and theoretical context, enhanced the interpretative value and underscored the implications of interpreting the research questions. In addition to the critical literature survey, the principles of design thinking were included to further explore the implications and recommendations of cognitive progression in doctoral pedagogy, specifically at a UoT.

### **9.2.2. Design thinking approaches**

In today's dynamic landscape, organisations encounter multifaceted dilemmas that necessitate inventive resolutions. Design thinking emerged as a methodology for problem-solving, harnessing principles from design to cultivate creativity, empathy, and collaboration. Also, design thinking has been widely reported as an effective tool in curriculum development (Duarte, Nobre, Pimentel & Jacquinet, 2021).

This section of the chapter explores the significance of design thinking

methodologies in reaching conclusions and formulating novel concepts and strategies, illustrating how they enable individuals and organisations to address diverse challenges with originality and efficacy.

Fundamentally, design thinking is anchored in a profound commitment to crafting solutions that significantly impact people's lives. Design thinking epitomises a human-centred approach to innovation, prioritising empathy, ideation, prototyping, and iteration. It advocates for a mindset characterised by curiosity and experimentation, urging scientists to challenge assumptions and view failure as a stepping stone for learning. Typically, design thinking methodologies encompass iterative stages, including empathising with users, defining problems, ideating solutions, prototyping concepts, and testing and refining ideas based on user feedback (Goff & Getenet, 2017). Central to design thinking is the emphasis on identifying with end-users to gain profound insights into their needs, preferences, and challenges. By engaging user experiences through feedback loops, design thinking develops a distinct understanding of the contextual backdrop in which problems arise and identifies veiled needs and missed opportunities. This iterative approach enhances comprehension of the problem domain and contemplates interventions that are both feasible and desirable. Collaboration lies at the heart of design thinking, drawing together individuals from diverse disciplines to co-create solutions. By embracing an inclusive and interdisciplinary approach to problem-solving, design thinking leverages the collective intelligence of teams, tapping into a broad spectrum of perspectives, skills, and expertise. Cross-disciplinary collaboration fosters creative synergies, catalysing the generation of innovative concepts and strategies that transcend conventional boundaries. The implementation and application of design thinking methodology are presented in section 9 of this chapter.

## 9.3 Innovation and research in higher education

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The landscape of higher education in technology is diverse, encompassing global institutes of technology renowned for their innovation and research prowess, as well as South African UoTs striving to meet the unique educational needs of the nation. This chapter explores the distinctions and similarities between these two categories of institutions, shedding light on their respective roles, strengths, and challenges.

### 9.3.1. Institutes of technology

Global Institutes of Technology (GITs), situated in various countries, are celebrated for their innovative research, advanced facilities, and international collaboration. These institutions attract top talent from around the world, fostering a diverse and dynamic academic environment. Known for their emphasis on science, engineering, and technology, global institutes of technology contribute significantly to global innovation and progress. The likes of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Stanford University, and ETH Zurich stand as exemplars of excellence, setting benchmarks for research output, technological advancements, and academic impact.

As beacons of excellence and ethical conduct, GITs play a pivotal role in fostering international cooperation and creating a brighter and more sustainable future for humanity. As one of the primary mandates of GITs is to promote international collaboration and knowledge exchange, these institutes serve as hubs where researchers, scientists, and scholars from around the world converge to share ideas, methodologies, and findings. These institutes of technology thrive on international collaboration, engaging in research partnerships and knowledge exchange with institutions worldwide. This collaboration enriches the

academic experience and enhances the global impact of research outcomes. Through their collaborative efforts, these institutes contribute to the collective knowledge pool, address pressing global challenges, and drive technological advancements. Collaborative research projects undertaken by GITs often involve multidisciplinary teams, fostering a rich and diverse intellectual environment. This collaboration enhances the quality and impact of research outcomes by incorporating varied perspectives and expertise. These institutions boast state-of-the-art research facilities, laboratories, and infrastructure, enabling groundbreaking research across various technological domains. Global institutes attract and retain top-tier faculty members who are experts in their fields, contributing to the institution's academic reputation and research output.

### **9.3.2. Catalysts for global innovation and research**

GITs are equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, innovative laboratories, and top-tier faculty, fostering an environment conducive to groundbreaking discoveries. The research mandates of GITs prioritise innovative research and technological innovation. So, they are at the forefront of addressing global challenges through their research initiatives and play a crucial role in shaping the landscape of global innovation and research. As such, these institutions are dedicated to pushing the boundaries of knowledge and technology (Krishna, 2019).

The focus on innovation extends beyond academic research to the development of new technologies, products, and processes that have practical applications in various industries. GITs often collaborate with industry partners, further bridging the gap between academia and real-world technological advancements. Amongst others, solutions to challenges such as climate change, sustainable development, public health crises, and technological disruptions are investigated. As mentioned, GITs leverage their international networks to assemble



## CHAPTER 9

teams of experts capable of tackling these issues on a global scale. The research conducted at these institutes contributes not only to the advancement of knowledge but also to the development of practical solutions with the potential to benefit societies worldwide.

GITs emphasise the importance of ethical and responsible research practices. As global leaders in technology and science, these institutes set standards for research integrity, transparency, and ethical conduct. GITs not only produce knowledge but also instil in their researchers a sense of responsibility towards society and the environment. This commitment to ethical research ensures that advancements in technology are made with careful consideration of their societal implications.

### **9.3.3. South African Universities of Technology**

The South African UoTs play a dynamic role in addressing the specific educational, societal, and developmental needs of the country. With an emphasis on the implementation of scientific knowledge, these universities contribute to the advancement of knowledge, the development of skilled professionals, and on addressing unique societal challenges in applied learning. The UoTs ensure that graduates are well-equipped with practical skills that align with industry needs, fostering employability. As such, the focus is on applied knowledge, skills development, and industry relevance (Garraway & Winberg, 2019). Examples are the Central University of Technology, Free State, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Durban University of Technology, Mangosuthu University of Technology and the Tshwane University of Technology. These UoTs emphasise practical and vocational education, preparing students for real-world challenges through, for example, the avenues of work-integrated learning (WIL) (Jacobs & Dzansi, 2015). UoTs play a crucial role in addressing socio-economic challenges specific to South Africa.

Research at UoTs focuses on application, with an emphasis on professional and technical skills and close ties with the industry. By itself, students may have the opportunity to work on industry-related projects and collaborate with industry and businesses. Since UoTs are relatively young institutions (ca. 30 years), they cannot compete with traditional universities based on factors, such as the research track records, the supervisory capacity and available funding for doctoral graduate research (see section 7). In developing countries and South Africa particularly, the perceptions about universities of technology, have been clouded by components of exclusivity and quality, partially informed by the evolution of the former Technikons into UoTs, and mergers with PDIs (CHE, 2016). Unfortunately, rather than embracing their specialist and sought-after niches, despite the purpose of UoTs being outlined in national policy documents, they have aspired to become like traditional universities (CHE, 2016). The aspirations of UoTs to be similar to traditional universities reiterates their concept of subservience, whereas challenges related to governance have unfortunately also contributed to such perceptions. This has brought about difficulties for UoTs to engage on national and international authoritative platforms, and more specifically the ability of students and academics to articulate amongst institutions, the latter being seen as less able because of poorer and resource-deprived histories.

Paradoxically, UoTs have replied to several narratives as the partners of choice in responding to the various challenges. The graduates from UoTs have increasingly been identified as having skills beyond those from traditional, comprehensive universities, necessitated by responses to their deprived and often limited-resourced backgrounds. Skills such as creativity, application, and resilience are but some of these competencies. The reality is that such individuals are vilified and oppressed in terms of their competencies and forced into processes perceived as traditional and superior. Moreover, UoTs have increasingly

## CHAPTER 9

pursued the methodologies, systems, and processes of traditional universities, with a principal outcome being to diversion from their original purpose. Sadly, staff and students at UoTs still inculcate a narrative of subservience, and ultimately society is being deprived of responsive and applied solutions to its predicaments. While acknowledging the distinct strengths of the South African UoTs, they also face challenges driven by national traditional university governance and policy structures, such as funding and resource constraints, waning reputations, and the need for continuous adaptation to remain relevant.

### 9.4 Exploring research methodology curricula

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The term "curriculum" is a multifaceted and evolving subject because it encompasses a wide array of interpretations and philosophies that reflect differing educational goals, values, and cultural contexts. At its core, a curriculum is designed to outline what students are expected to learn and how that learning will be achieved, but the way this is conceptualized and executed can vary considerably. Contestation about flexibility and scope that can differ between institutions, regions, educational philosophies, cultural and political influences and pedagogical approaches has led to ongoing debates on what should be taught, how it should be taught, and why certain educational goals should be prioritized over others.

Lange (2017:32) explains that *curriculum* is "the process of engagement of students and staff with knowledge, behaviour and identity in different disciplinary contexts. Research methodology curricula serve as the bedrock of academic inquiry, providing students with a systematic framework to conduct meaningful and rigorous research (Williams, 2007). Rooted in established principles and practices, these curricula play a pivotal role in shaping the research skills of students across various disciplines. This section of the chapter delves into the

components, objectives, and significance of traditional research methodology curricula, examining how they lay the foundation for scholarly exploration and contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

Research methodology curricula provide a solid foundation for students pursuing advanced degrees or engaging in scholarly research (Ullah & Rafiq, 2023). The skills acquired through these curricula are transferable across various academic disciplines. By equipping students with the tools and techniques needed to conduct rigorous research, traditional curricula contribute to the generation of new knowledge. This is vital for the continuous advancement of academic fields and the broader society. Beyond academia, the research skills cultivated through traditional research methodology curricula prepare students for professional practice. Whether in the private or public sector, graduates with a strong research foundation are better equipped to navigate complex challenges and contribute to evidence-based decision-making.

#### **9.4.1. Conventional research methodology curricula**

Although traditional approaches are still constituting the foundations of research methodology across the South African Higher education landscape, particularly amongst the older established traditional and comprehensive institutions, contemporary trends in doctoral research methodologies have been emerging. This is reflected by a dynamic shift towards greater interdisciplinary integration, methodological flexibility, and technological advancement. These evolving practices highlight the increasing complexity and scope of doctoral research in today's academic landscape. The integration of digital tools such as artificial intelligence and supporting platforms also facilitates innovative forms of data visualization and dissemination, rendering research findings more accessible and impactful.

## CHAPTER 9

Research methodology curricula often commence with an exploration of philosophical underpinnings, introducing students to epistemological considerations, ontological perspectives, and the fundamental paradigms that shape research approaches (Bentley *et al.*, 2015). This foundational knowledge helps students understand the nature of knowledge and the various lenses through which research questions can be approached. Traditional research methodology curricula serve as the cornerstone of academic exploration, providing students with the skills and knowledge essential for conducting meaningful research. As the landscape of research continues to evolve, these traditional foundations remain crucial, offering a time-tested framework that empowers students to contribute to the ever-expanding body of knowledge across diverse disciplines. The enduring significance of traditional research methodology curricula lies in their ability to shape inquisitive minds, and critical thinking, foster ethical research practices, and cultivate the next generation of scholars and researchers (Liamputtong & Pranee, 2019).

### **Research designs and models**

A critical component of conventional research methodology curricula is the study of research design. This includes discussions on experimental, non-experimental, qualitative, and quantitative research designs. Students learn to choose appropriate methodologies based on the nature of their research questions, forming a robust framework for their studies.

### **Data collection and sampling**

Traditional curricula guide students through diverse data collection methods, ranging from surveys and interviews to observations and archival research. Emphasis is placed on the selection of the most suitable method for a given research context and the ethical considerations associated with data collection.

**Statistical analysis:** For quantitative research, traditional research methodology curricula typically include an introduction to statistical analysis. Students learn to interpret data, apply statistical tests, and draw meaningful conclusions. This component equips them with the skills needed to analyse and interpret quantitative findings accurately. Aligned with quantitative analysis, traditional curricula also delve into qualitative research methods. This includes coding, thematic analysis, and narrative inquiry, enabling students to explore the depth and nuances of qualitative data.

**Research ethics and integrity:** There has been a growing awareness of ethical considerations and the need for research integrity. Contemporary doctoral research places stronger emphasis on ethical issues such as data privacy, informed consent, and the responsible use of technology. Researchers are increasingly mindful of the potential impact of their work on participants and society, striving to uphold high standards of ethical practice throughout the research process. Because ethical considerations are integral to research, traditional curricula have focused on instilling in students a strong understanding of ethical guidelines and practices (Pillay & Qhobela, 2019). This ensures that research is conducted responsibly and with respect for the rights and well-being of participants. Methodological rigour has been fundamental to the credibility and validity of research findings. Researchers must design their studies carefully, selecting appropriate methods and techniques for data collection and analysis. Whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches are employed, it is essential to ensure that the chosen methods are rigorous, reliable, and suitable for addressing the research objectives. Furthermore, researchers should adhere to ethical guidelines and standards to protect the rights and well-being of research participants.

## CHAPTER 9

**Validity and reliability:** These are principal components needed for drawing accurate conclusions and making meaningful interpretations. Researchers must employ strategies to ensure the reliability and validity of their data, including proper sampling techniques, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods. Furthermore, transparency and openness in reporting methodologies and findings enhance the credibility of research outcomes, allowing other scholars to replicate and verify the results. Bias can compromise the objectivity and reliability of research findings significantly. Researchers must be vigilant in identifying and minimising sources of bias throughout the research process. This includes bias in study design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Strategies for minimising bias may include randomisation, blinding, controlling for confounding variables, and using validated measurement instruments. Moreover, researchers should reflect on their assumptions, perspectives, and preconceptions critically to avoid letting personal biases influence the research outcomes.

**Peer review:** Peer review plays an essential role in ensuring the quality and objectivity of research. By subjecting research manuscripts to scrutiny by independent experts in the field, peer review assists in identifying errors, weaknesses, and potential biases in the research methodology and findings. Peer-reviewed publications are generally considered more credible and reliable, as they have undergone rigorous evaluation by qualified peers. Moreover, researchers should welcome constructive feedback from peers and collaborators, using it to improve the robustness and validity of their research.

**Effective communication:** Traditional research methodology curricula emphasise the importance of clear and effective communication of research findings. Students learn to draft research proposals, academic papers, and reports, enhancing their ability to disseminate knowledge

within the scholarly community. Amidst increasing disinformation globally, the skills to present and defend research findings on written, social or scientific platforms has become a key competency requirement among researchers and scientists.

## 9.5 Research in the developing context

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Basic research, also known as fundamental or pure research, forms the bedrock of scientific inquiry, aiming to expand our understanding of the natural world without immediate practical applications in mind. While basic research has contributed immensely to scientific advancements, it is not without its shortfalls. This section explores some of the inherent challenges and limitations associated with basic research, shedding light on the complexities researchers face in their pursuit of foundational knowledge (Bentley, Gulbrandsen & Kyvik, 2015).

Research projects can be resource-intensive in terms of time, money, and manpower. The exploration of fundamental questions may require long-term commitments, sophisticated equipment, and specialised expertise. As a result, research initiatives often face challenges in securing sustained funding and maintaining the momentum necessary for successful completion. Basic research may therefore face challenges in competing for funding when compared to applied or translational research, limiting the opportunities for scientists to explore fundamental questions that may not yield immediate benefits. A primary disadvantage of research that is basic in nature, is its lack of immediate practical application. Basic research often engages theoretical aspects that may not have direct, real-world applications in the short term. The nature of basic research involves exploring the unknown, and as such, outcomes can be uncertain. Researchers may invest substantial time and resources without a guarantee of discovering groundbreaking insights. This unpredictability can make it difficult to



justify the allocation of resources, especially in contexts where immediate and tangible results are prioritised. One of the disadvantages of superimposing a Eurocentric approach to research in the developing milieu is that basic research findings are often communicated in technical language. As such the broader public, policymakers, and scientists from other disciplines often have trouble comprehending the significance and application of the research. This communication barrier can hinder the translation of basic research into practical applications and limit its impact on society.

### 9.6 Applied research: Translating theoretical knowledge into actionable strategies

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As a country, South Africa faces a range of social and economic challenges that demand targeted and practical solutions (Muller, 2021). Although there are arguments to contradict the clear distinction between basic and applied research (Gulbrandsen & Kyvik, 2010), it is assumed that applied research plays a vital role in translating theoretical knowledge into actionable strategies. By addressing these challenges through applied research, South Africa can work towards building a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable society.

Collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and communities is essential to ensure that the findings of applied research are implemented effectively to bring about positive social and economic change. A few current-day national challenges that would benefit from applied research include access to quality healthcare and education, novel and alternative service delivery, climate change and sustainability, and socio-political solutions. Applied research can, for example, contribute by evaluating healthcare delivery models, assessing the impact of interventions, and proposing innovations to improve access, especially in rural areas. Disparities in the education system, including

unequal access to quality education and limited educational resources, contribute to social inequality. Applied research can propose innovative teaching methods, technology integration, and policies that enhance educational opportunities and outcomes for all. In addition to the mentioned challenges, South Africa grapples with high crime rates, affecting both personal safety and economic stability. Applied research can inform evidence-based crime- prevention strategies, community-policing models, and interventions that address the root causes of criminal behaviour.

High levels of unemployment, particularly among the youth, is another significant challenge in South Africa. Research outcomes that focus on identifying sectors with growth potential, developing skills training programs, and supporting entrepreneurship to create sustainable employment opportunities are highly sought-after. Persistent economic and social inequality is another pressing issue in South Africa where applied research can explore policies and interventions that promote inclusive economic growth, address disparities in education and healthcare, and create pathways for marginalised communities to participate in the economy.

## 9.7 South African perspectives

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In South Africa, doctoral pedagogy lends itself to flexibility, with a variety of models of ‘teaching’ or supervision. This may vary between the apprenticeship and the cohort supervision models. Currently, 23 of the 26 public universities and five private higher education institutions in South Africa offer doctoral degree programmes (CHE, 2022). The public universities are classified as being traditional (mainly research-intensive), comprehensive (a combination of a traditional university and one or more UoT), or universities of technology (former Technikons) (CHE, 2016). Cloete *et al.* (2016) argue that the traditional university

## CHAPTER 9

sector makes the largest contribution to doctoral student outputs. These universities have the advantage of a longer history, an existing research reputation; thus an advantage to access and compete for funding, specifically based on the research outputs (CHE, 2016).

Traditional universities are known for their focus on academic research and exploring theories in a wide range of disciplines. This includes philosophy, literature, and sciences. In addition, these universities have a long history and evidence of the research track record, locally and internationally. They provide students with strong academic networks and potential global connections. The existing footprint in the higher education landscape provided them with a historical reputation of adequate supervisory capacity (Cloete *et al.*, 2016). The South African CHE has benchmarked postgraduate research outcomes on the masters level, in principle as demonstrating competency and mastery of the research methodological process, while the outcomes on a doctoral level are defined as a new contribution to science. This specification paves the way for a differentiation between cognitive levels of argument, rather than volume or repetition. One therefore assumes that the bulk of responsibility and expectation of novel innovations and concepts that bring about the implementation of findings resides at the doctoral level. Guided by the revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (DHET, 2014), two types of doctoral degrees are supported. Both on level ten, the first is the doctoral degree with the focus on the preparation for the academic career and research, either discipline-based or multi-disciplinary (PhD). The other is the professional doctoral degree, which is career oriented. This qualification has a professional or career-oriented context and typically integrates theory and practice through the application of theory context (e.g. Doctor of Pharmacy).

Given the diversity in the higher education landscape, the conundrum that a potential doctoral graduate must deal with is whether to pursue doctoral studies at a university or a UoT. At the heart of this debate is the initial or historical differentiation of the higher education landscape in South Africa, specifically after announcing the mergers. No longer was the differentiation linked to indicators such as the advantaged and previously disadvantaged. Additional indicators were applied, such as institutions with a research function and those established with a different purpose. Technikons (now universities of technology) fell within the latter category (CHE, 2016). This 'classification' had several implications, such as identity, funding formulas, and teaching and learning practices. Also, consider the historical factor that the Technikon/UoTs purpose was not initially research-focused (Cloete *et al.*, 2016). As such, some of the considerations that a potential student might use to choose the appropriate academic home for doctoral studies are linked to the focus of the study, the discipline, the reputation of the university, and the personal preferences and career goals of the doctoral candidate.

In 2020 and 2021 the CHE and the National Research Foundation (NRF) undertook a review to promote and enhance the quality of doctoral offerings at higher education institutions in South Africa. This review took a holistic view of doctoral offerings in South Africa, such as institutional contexts, the purpose of the qualification, funding to support doctoral studies, supervision, assessment, and graduate attributes. Although some institutions and scholars have questioned the standards used in the review, the doctoral review report (2022) highlighted several challenges in doctoral pedagogy. One challenge is the graduate attributes at doctoral level. Previously the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) and the South African Regional University Association released reports on doctoral education, in 2010 and 2012 respectively. These reports, in addition to the HEQSF (2014)

emphasise that doctoral studies entail more than drafting the thesis. To present the work to the scientific community, writing and communication skills are required. Research results need to be applied, and creatively linked to innovations (Lategan, 2017).

### **9.7.1. Attributes infused through doctoral pedagogy**

Barrie (2006) indicated that the quality of a university's graduates is an indication of the role and purpose of that university. Like the case studies from Australia, this role and purpose remain an institutional rather than a national approach. Many universities in South Africa have adopted the South African Qualifications (SAQA) level descriptors (SAQA, 2012) at levels nine and ten as a benchmark for the knowledge, competencies and attributes that their master's and doctoral levels must attain in the absence of specifically identified attributes at these levels. However, Barrie (2006) highlighted the variety of definitions and attributes in the Australian context. It is therefore not surprising that, based on these required competencies at the doctoral level (level ten), several other authors also reported on the limitations identified in doctoral theses, the difficulties that doctoral students encounter as well as in the competencies that they attain. Cloete *et al.* (2016) emphasised the importance of higher education and specifically doctoral education in preparing future academics as well as high levels of skills for the knowledge economy. In addition, Barnett (2012) reminds the higher education community that the world of work for which graduates must be prepared is uncertain and complex. For this reason, a look at the kind of doctoral graduates, their research outputs and the attributes of these graduates is needed.

As indicated previously, the CHE (2022) reported on the attributes expected of a doctoral candidate. The report highlighted the inconsistent formulation of the graduate attributes across institutions, a lack of knowledge on this topic among students and supervisors, and

insufficient monitoring of these attributes in the absence of assessment criteria and assessment tasks. The CHE report (2022) reminds us that graduate attributes involve knowledge attributes and skills attributes; thus both the knowing and the knowers. The responsibility to reflect on their becoming and being (Green & Lee in Bitzer *et al.*, 2014) must be linked to the graduate's agency and therefore involves a self-assessment. Although not mentioned in these documents, our addition to this pedagogy is the agency of the doctoral student. These expectations align with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) level ten descriptors (SAQA, 2012).

The purpose of SAQA's level descriptors is to guide learning coherence and progression and to facilitate assessment (SAQA, 2012). The philosophical underpinning is applied competence and is based on the outcomes-based theoretical framework. SAQA (2012) explains that applied competence has three elements, namely foundational, practical, and reflexive competence. Practical competence involves intellectual and/or academic skills of knowledge based on the higher-order thinking levels in Bloom's Taxonomy (Bagchi & Sharma, 2014) of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation and includes the concept of operational context. Lastly, reflexive competence emphasises the graduate's autonomy, taking ownership of the research project outcomes and showing agency to pursue the desired attributes. Ten categories are used to describe the applied competencies across each of the ten levels. The ten competencies linked to the ten levels are the scope of knowledge, knowledge literacy, method, and procedure, problem-solving, ethics, and professional practice, accessing, processing, and managing information, producing, and communicating information, context and systems, management of learning, and accountability (SAQA, 2012).

## CHAPTER 9

The knowledge attribute is an in-depth knowledge of the scientific field or a specific area. While the CHE (2022) report mentioned the doctoral candidate's ability to interconnect the research topic and other fields within and across the discipline, Trafford and Leshem (2012: 40) refer to the term 'doctorateness'. Graduates are expected to show evidence of their original contribution to the study field, or discipline. Evidence of achieving this attribute is captured in the innovations in research methodology, the application of theory, and new techniques or practices proposed (Trafford & Leshem, 2012). The last attribute linked to the knowledge attributes is the doctoral candidate's ethical awareness and professional conduct. Ethical awareness is linked to the research subjects and communities included in the research, as well as research integrity. Plagiarism, data manipulation, and acknowledgement in their publications are linked to research integrity.

The skills attributes refer to how a doctoral candidate selects and applies the appropriate research approach, the ability to work independently, conceptualise, and reflect critically, Communication skills, to show competence at an advanced level, and the ability to share or disseminate the research findings with both expert and non-expert communities. This relates to sharing information verbally and in writing. Critical and analytical thinking and intellectual competence are essential for applying problem-solving skills in diverse contexts, in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts.

### **9.7.2. Contemporary constructs and explorations**

A shortcoming in the doctoral pedagogy and theses is the fact that most of the graduate attributes, except for the writing skills, might not be evident. There is an argument that a viva would be a vehicle for the doctoral candidate to show evidence of the acquired graduate attributes such as verbal communication, critical thinking and problem-solving. Although the viva has been implemented at some of the traditional

universities, there is a current drive to include such in the assessment policies of all the universities – also based on the CHE doctoral review report (CHE, 2022). Another shortcoming is the ability of the student to evaluate and synthesise the information and to link the findings to enhance current practices or address social responsiveness, showing ‘doctorateness’ (Trafford & Leshem, 2012).

In this section, doctoral pedagogy initiatives to respond to the recommendations in the CHE review report (2022), to align with the graduates’ limitations mentioned and enhance their cognitive progression, and link to the ‘pedagogy-in-action’ principles aimed at the UoT landscape, are proposed and discussed. The planned pedagogy proposes a shift and refocuses on the doctoral graduates’ scholarly knowledge, and skills. In addition, this pedagogy should encourage graduates to unlock their agency and develop the attitudes, and attributes required, and holistically, they learn to become socially responsive and engage in research with a societal impact. As Green and Lee (1995) (in Bitzer *et al.*, 2014:234) eloquently say, ‘understanding pedagogy as coming to know and coming to be’.

The one change imperative is responding to the demands for larger numbers of doctoral graduates (Cloete *et al.*, 2016; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). The other imperative discussed here, is to reshape, shift, and innovate doctoral pedagogy, to equip the graduates with scholarly knowledge, skills, attitudes, and attributes as an enabler in enhancing their employability (Bagchi & Sharma 2014). Furthermore, Taylor (2023) argues that pedagogy must focus on the graduates’ preparation to become a researcher inside academia, but also outside academia. Hoon *et al.* (2021) emphasise the importance of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. These authors highlight attributes such as self-management, critical thinking, flexibility, adaptability, innovation, and creativity.



## CHAPTER 9

Tshumu and Bitzer (2023) advocate for initiatives to promote doctoral attributes and at the same time shorten doctoral completion times.

Cloete *et al.* (2016) share student preparedness to conduct and complete the doctoral journey in a minimum stretch of time. Students experience a range of difficulties such as conceptualising the project, constructing a theoretical framework, supporting the methodology, synthesising findings, creating coherent responses in line with the problem statement, demonstrating self-discipline, and being able to communicate in writing. Hoon, Narayanan and Abdullah (2021) add the graduates' difficulty in constructing theoretical frameworks. As such, Cloete *et al.* (2016) ascribe this challenge, as well as the difficulties with writing and conceptualisation, to the graduates' lack of prior reading, not being in command of their field, not being familiar with the current academic debates, and a lack of academic rigour. Wellington (2010) refers to the barriers in writing and mentions that the reading limitations result in graduates being unfamiliar with the academic writing styles and rules of academic writing. In addition, graduates then struggle to interpret the supervisors' feedback and constructive critique to adjust their writing.

There are external complexities to consider in proposing the desired doctoral pedagogy. As such, Taylor (2023) and Boughey and McKenna (2021) remind us of the diversity of the student population brought by massification, internationalisation, and the demand for larger numbers of graduates. As such, we must bear in mind that larger numbers of students study part-time and as such, have additional responsibilities, such as family and work. Several authors support initiatives such as interdisciplinary collaboration. It is argued that through interdisciplinary research projects, graduates learn to engage with diverse methodologies and different perspectives. As such, doctoral graduates learn to collaborate with different departments, including industry and

so broaden their problem-solving approaches in academia and beyond. Socratic seminars, regular workshop sessions, colloquia, and critical review sessions at regular intervals in the doctoral journey provide an opportunity for doctoral students to collaborate, present their work, engage in discussions, and challenge each other's viewpoints, arguments, and assumptions. At these events, graduates are sensitised to the importance of evidence-based reasoning and dialogue (Tshuma & Bitzer, 2023). During these sessions, students analyse, critique, and review each other's work and opinions and foster a culture of constructive feedback, almost as a community of practice. In addition to the scientific knowledge, Tshuma and Bitzer (2023) maintain that these sessions are important to promote the doctoral attributes and are reflected in the activities in which the doctoral graduates engage. McKenna and van Schalkwyk (2023) also promote the collaborative and structured approach in doctoral pedagogy. They argue that the nurturing space and community create mutual support and this action increases the doctoral graduates' commitment and accountability. These authors maintain that doctoral graduates develop a larger range of skills when they work together. A culture of collegiality, creativity, and supportive criticality is created, and graduates are better equipped to engage in critical discussions. In this environment, peers and supervisors appraise their work.

Sykes and Azfar (2019) align the development of doctoral attributes, such as critical thinking and questioning, and abstract thinking skills to the higher-order levels of Bloom's taxonomy or framework. The ideal doctoral pedagogy must facilitate creativity – the ability to think beyond, identify gaps in the current knowledge, foster curiosity, and contribute to the current academic debate - through discussions, feedback, and collaborative projects. Carragher and Brereton (2022) support a journal club to develop deep learning approaches and engage doctoral graduates in analysis and conceptual skills. Through the journal club

## CHAPTER 9

activities, critical thinking is scaffolded. Linked to Bloom's Taxonomy, activities are specifically related to the level to apply, as well as the higher-order levels to analyse, evaluate and create. Reflective practice, such as journal clubs encourages self-assessment. They learn to document their learning experiences, the challenges, insights gained, and strategies developed for improvement. And so, graduates gain the attribute of becoming resilient.

El Gaidi (in Bitzer *et al.*, 2014) emphasises developing scientific knowledge, skills, and attributes. The doctoral graduates' ability to contribute to the academic debate, the knowledge attributes, and specialised knowledge in the field – and skills and attributes to work independently and think critically and analyse is also in line with the SAQA level descriptors (SAQA, 2012). Skills and attributes such as critical thinking, creativity, and critical judgement are developed through design-based research strategies. Graduates learn to identify shortcomings in their work and how to propose improvements. Through design-based research strategies, graduates learn to systematically analyse information to solve complex real-world problems with evidence-based solutions (Goff & Getenet, 2017). As such they learn to be socially responsive by using these principles to identify research activities beyond the present study.

Doctoral graduates writing and language competencies and skills benefit from visiting the writing centre and attending focused writing sessions (Cloete *et al.*, 2016). Wellington (2010) adds that doctoral graduates' writing benefits most from a group approach. In addition to the writing sessions, actions such as formative feedback have the intention to develop the doctoral graduate agency and attitude and will develop writing skills. New developments such as Chat GPT and artificial intelligence (AI) have revolutionised the higher education environment. Infusing doctoral pedagogy with Chat GPT and AI offers numerous

benefits and could bring about innovative and transformative changes in the way doctoral education is delivered (Verma & Rawat, 2023). As such, ethical considerations, data privacy, and ensuring a balance with human interaction should be carefully addressed. Added to this, ongoing training both for educators and students will be essential to make the most of these technologies and/or tools.

The doctoral student can use Chat GPT and AI to generate feedback on their work, answer questions; thus enhance the learning experiences. When used appropriately, these tools can guide the doctoral graduate in formulating the research question, and assist in the literature review, data analysis, and research design. It is however important that the doctoral graduate must have a thorough knowledge of their field, to view the information generated with the relevant criticality. We previously mentioned the importance of collaboration. Chat GPT, AI and social media make it possible for a doctoral graduate to collaborate virtually and share ideas globally (Wang, Reis-Jorge, Crosta, Edwards & Mudaliar, 2018). By doing so, the research environment becomes dynamic and inclusive. Communication difficulties and limitations could be addressed as Chat GPT offers language support and an opportunity to develop academic writing and communication skills. For this reason, doctoral graduates might not only have to rely on the writing centre's support for language corrections, sentence constructions, and improvements. Sharing their work with the communities of practice may therefore become easier. Doctoral graduates can also use these tools to assist in giving feedback to their peers.

Two additional attributes are relevant here, namely critical thinking skills and ethical behaviour. Chat GPT could potentially increase the supervision capacity and assist the supervisor in engaging the doctoral graduates in critical thinking exercises, challenging students with thought-provoking questions and scenarios. This promotes deeper

## CHAPTER 9

reflection and enhances the development of critical thinking skills; thus aligning their learning with the higher-order Bloom's taxonomy. Since funding to attend conferences, specifically internationally, has become a challenge, doctoral graduates could be exposed to such an environment, albeit simulated, by creating a virtual conference platform. However, it is essential to emphasise the ethical use of these tools. Being transparent and discussing the ethical implications of AI in research, ensures doctoral students are aware of responsible AI use in their work. However, at the heart of innovative and transformative practices at the doctoral level, being socially responsive, and being an active and responsible citizen, is the doctoral student's agency.

### 9.8 Creativity and innovation

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Creativity is a key competency to enable innovation and application. Creativity enables various outcomes that realise the transfer of research findings in innovative applications. Innovation often involves finding new solutions to existing problems or addressing emerging challenges. Creativity allows individuals and teams to think creatively, explore unconventional ideas, and come up with novel approaches to tackle these problems effectively. Creativity is also essential for generating a wide range of ideas. In the process of innovation, there is a need to brainstorm and explore various possibilities. Creative thinking enables individuals to produce diverse ideas, which can then be evaluated and refined to identify the most promising ones (Vergara & Serna Rodriguez, 2019).

In competitive environments, innovation helps organisations stand out from the crowd. Creativity allows for the development of unique products, services, or processes that differentiate a company from its competitors. This uniqueness can be a key driver of success in the market. In today's fast-paced world, change is constant. Creative

thinking enables individuals and organisations to adapt to change more effectively by exploring new ways of doing things, anticipating future trends, and proactively innovating to stay ahead. Innovation is not simply about radical breakthroughs; it also involves incremental improvements. Creativity plays a crucial role in identifying opportunities for enhancement and innovation in existing products, processes, or services, leading to continuous improvement over time. Creativity has the power to inspire others and foster a culture of innovation within organisations. When individuals see creativity being valued and rewarded, they are more likely to feel motivated to contribute their innovative ideas and initiatives. Many of the challenges we face today are complex and multifaceted. Creativity allows for the exploration of interconnected issues from different angles, leading to more holistic and effective solutions.

### **9.8.1. Traits and attributes of creativity**

Both innovation and creativity are complex and multifaceted traits and can manifest in various forms. While there isn't a one-size-fits-all formula for creativity, certain skills and attributes tend to be associated with fostering a creative mindset (Fetrati & Nielsen, 2018). Creativity is a skill that can be developed and enhanced over time. It also is a highly individual and personal trait; so, what works for one person may not work the same way for another. Embracing a combination of these skills and continually cultivating a creative mindset can contribute to fostering creativity in various aspects of life.

Creative individuals are typically open to new ideas and perspectives. They are willing to consider unconventional or unorthodox solutions to problems. A curious mind drives exploration and the desire to learn, and creative people tend to ask questions, seek information, and have a natural curiosity about the world around them. Creative thinkers are adaptable and can adjust their thinking and approach when faced with

## CHAPTER 9

new information or challenges. They are not rigid in their ways and are open to change. The ability to imagine and visualise possibilities is crucial for creativity. This involves thinking beyond the obvious and envisioning novel concepts or solutions. Creativity often involves finding innovative solutions to problems. Being able to approach challenges with a problem-solving mindset is a key aspect of creativity. Creativity often requires stepping outside of one's comfort zone and taking risks. This can involve trying new things, experimenting with ideas, and not being afraid of failure.

Creative endeavours often face setbacks and challenges; hence persistence and resilience are essential for overcoming obstacles and continuing to pursue creative goals. Effectively expressing and communicating ideas is crucial for creativity. Whether through writing, speaking, or other forms of expression, being able to convey thoughts and concepts is vital. Collaboration is an important outcome of effective communication, with creative individuals often benefiting from collaboration and teamwork. Sharing ideas with others, receiving feedback, and working collectively can lead to more innovative outcomes. Paying attention to details and being observant of the world around you can inspire creative ideas. Noticing patterns, connections, and anomalies can spark new thoughts and insights. Balancing creativity with productivity requires effective time management. Creative projects often involve a combination of inspiration and discipline. The ability to shift between different modes of thinking and consider multiple perspectives is important for creativity. This cognitive flexibility allows for a more comprehensive approach to problem-solving.

Many of the traits and attributes referred to are prevalent among developing societies due to the demand to survive in under-resourced environments. However, traditional, and Eurocentric pedagogies have through recent centuries advanced the idea of specialisation and

uniqueness. This was a result of westernised educational institutions not having to collaborate, or negotiate resources, to achieve results but simply having the benefit of delegation. In the developing context, and responding to the decolonisation narrative, the time has come to appreciate and explore the variety of traits and attributes inherent in our students and scientists (Weiner, 1997). We previously emphasised that applied research and innovative pedagogies play a crucial role in translating theoretical knowledge into practical solutions that address real-world problems. However, the effectiveness of applied research outcomes heavily relies on the cognitive progression of researchers and ideally, the doctoral graduates.

## 9.9 Stepwise cognitive progression: A contemporary approach

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The content of the current chapter thus far is intended as a backdrop for the prototype described in the next section (see Table 1). The dichotomy with the proposed methodology lies in the fact that one should endeavour to instil skills and competencies in doctoral graduates to enable tangible outcomes. The stepwise cognitive progression model that is presented below, has therefore been conceptualised through the Stanford design thinking methodology. Cognitive progression refers to the continuous advancement of knowledge, skills, and cognitive abilities among researchers, which in turn enhances the quality and relevance of their work.

### 9.9.1. Cognitive progression and knowledge acquisition

The cognitive progression begins with the acquisition of foundational knowledge. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Thompson, 2019), individuals progress through stages of cognitive



## CHAPTER 9

development, each characterised by distinct ways of understanding the world. In the context of applied research, researchers need to acquire a solid understanding of theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and empirical evidence relevant to their field of study. This foundational knowledge serves as the basis for conducting meaningful research and generating innovative solutions. For instance, in the field of public health, researchers need to understand epidemiological principles, statistical methods, and health behavioural theories to design and implement interventions aimed at improving population health outcomes effectively (Glanz, Rimer & Viswanath, 2015). Without a strong foundation in these areas, researchers might struggle to develop evidence-based interventions that have a measurable impact on health outcomes.

### **9.9.2. Cognitive progression and analytical competency**

In addition to knowledge acquisition, cognitive progression involves the development of analytical skills necessary for critically evaluating information, identifying patterns, and making informed decisions. Researchers must be able to apply analytical thinking to interpret research findings, assess the validity of conclusions, and identify potential limitations or biases in study designs. Critical thinking, a key component of analytical skills, enables researchers and doctoral students to question assumptions, consider alternative explanations, and draw logical conclusions (Vergara & Serna Rodriguez, 2019). By continuously refining their analytical skills, researchers and doctoral students enhance their ability to generate novel insights and solutions to complex problems (Baptista, 2015). For example, in the field of environmental science, researchers employ various analytical techniques to assess the impact of human activities on ecosystems and develop strategies for sustainable resource management (Levin, 2006).

Through cognitive progression, researchers refine their analytical skills, enabling them to conduct rigorous analyses and produce reliable evidence to inform policy decisions and conservation efforts.

### **9.9.3. Cognitive progression and creativity**

Creativity is yet another essential aspect of cognitive progression that facilitates innovation and problem-solving in applied research. Creativity involves the generation of novel ideas, approaches, and solutions that depart from conventional thinking (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). In the context of applied research, creativity enables researchers to develop original interventions, methodologies, or technologies that address unmet needs or challenges in society. For instance, in the field of engineering, researchers often rely on creative thinking to design new technologies or improve existing ones (Sawyer, 2012). By fostering cognitive progression, researchers can cultivate creativity through exposure to diverse perspectives, collaboration with experts from different disciplines, and experimentation with unconventional approaches.

### **9.9.4. Cognitive progression and adaptability**

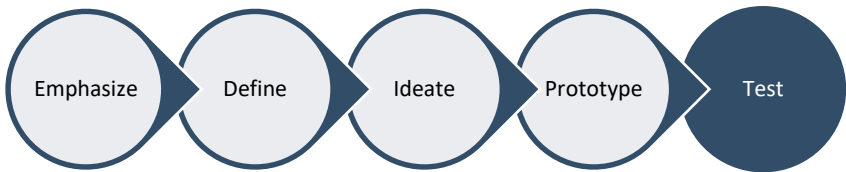
Cognitive progression entails the ability to adapt to new information, technologies, and methodologies. The pace of scientific advancement is rapid, and researchers need to continuously update their knowledge and skills to stay relevant in their field. This adaptability is particularly crucial in applied research, where emerging trends, technologies, and societal needs constantly reshape research priorities and methodologies. For example, advancements in digital technologies have revolutionised data collection, analysis, and dissemination in various fields, such as healthcare, education, and environmental science (Topol, 2019). Researchers who embrace these technologies and adapt their

## CHAPTER 9

research practices accordingly are better positioned to produce timely and impactful outcomes that address contemporary challenges.

### 9.9.5. Design enablers

The previous sections of this chapter serve as a backdrop informing the ‘empathise’ and ‘define’ components of the Stanford model of design thinking (Auernhammer and Roth, 2021.), whereas this section, introduces the concepts related to ‘ideation’ (Figure 9.1).



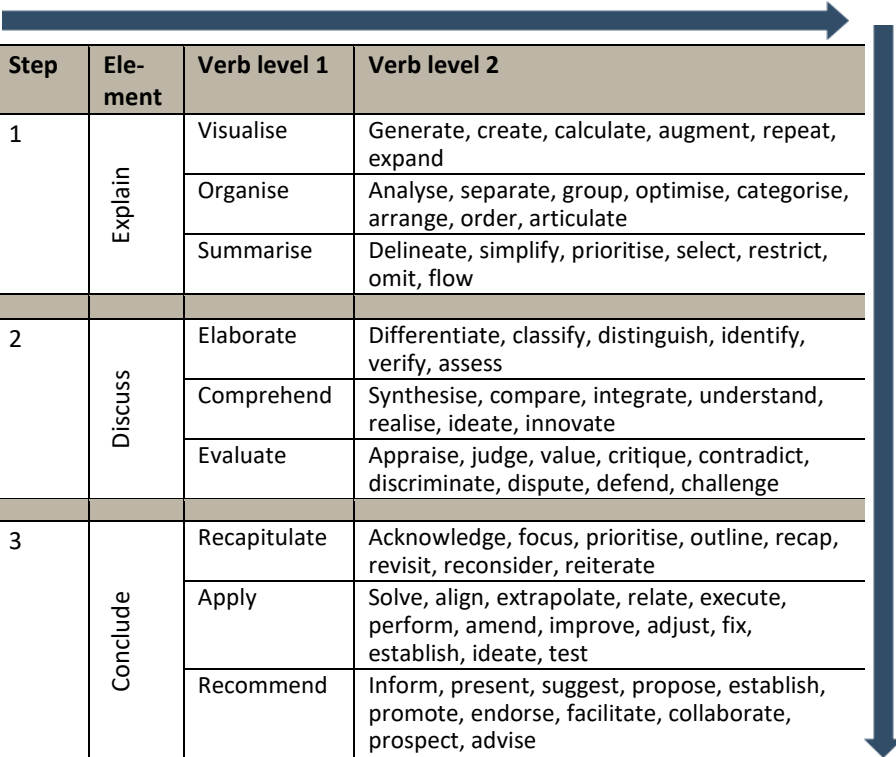
**Figure 9.1: The Stanford design thinking process (adapted from Auernhammer and Roth, 2021)**

Table 9.1 below relates to the ‘prototype’ component to inform a practical model or formula to assist with the interpretation and implementation of the data and findings generated through research. Although the blueprint proposed below focuses on data processing, interpretation, and application, similar steps may likely be utilised to inform the remaining components of the research and innovation value chain. The chronology to utilise the proposed model (indicated by the arrows) is essential for its effective application, as the suggested cognitive verbs can be considered a brick wall for instance, where the lower levels are required before engaging the next.

The chronology aspect of the proposed formula is also vital to prevent the compilation and reporting of large volumes of data without in-depth engagement of the actual findings. This phenomenon, which is often

incorrectly considered as having merit because of the perceived volume of work of a doctorate compared with a master's, should largely be addressed if the stepwise formula is strictly followed. Another predicament that also often emerges in especially doctoral research, is that the descriptive and inferential statistics that are required to provide a clear picture of the study outcomes are often under-represented when compared with the volume of empirical data collected. Strictly following the 'explain' element, with its sub-verbs, should largely mitigate this.

**Table 9.1: A stepwise cognitive progression model to facilitate the flow of thoughts and arguments to enable maximum utilisation of empirical data and its culmination into tangible outcomes (adapted from Bagchi & Sharma, 2014)**



Step	Element	Verb level 1	Verb level 2
1	Explain	Visualise	Generate, create, calculate, augment, repeat, expand
		Organise	Analyse, separate, group, optimise, categorise, arrange, order, articulate
		Summarise	Delineate, simplify, prioritise, select, restrict, omit, flow
2	Discuss	Elaborate	Differentiate, classify, distinguish, identify, verify, assess
		Comprehend	Synthesise, compare, integrate, understand, realise, ideate, innovate
		Evaluate	Appraise, judge, value, critique, contradict, discriminate, dispute, defend, challenge
3	Conclude	Recapitulate	Acknowledge, focus, prioritise, outline, recap, revisit, reconsider, reiterate
		Apply	Solve, align, extrapolate, relate, execute, perform, amend, improve, adjust, fix, establish, ideate, test
		Recommend	Inform, present, suggest, propose, establish, promote, endorse, facilitate, collaborate, prospect, advise

## CHAPTER 9

### **Challenge-oriented approaches**

One of the cognitive verb elements included in Table 1 that may justify additional deliberation is ‘challenge’, which resorts under the ‘evaluate’ verb level 1, and the ‘discuss’ element. This terminology links with the broader concept of problem-based and, more recently phrased ‘challenge’-oriented learning. This component extends the candidates’ cognitive approach not only to their thinking and inward reflection, but also provides opportunities to engage with peers, experts, and mentors.

Challenging the outcomes and thought patterns by proposing alternatives and viewpoints that test the status quo and invite considerations that may advance the horizons’ of existing knowledge, is a strong catalyst for solving problems and responding to challenges. Such challenges are not only articulated by peers and mentors but are also posed by our current societal demands and needs.

### **Formative assessment**

Also described in section 9.7, the essential component of formative assessment, is constructive formative feedback using scaffolded learning opportunities. Through scaffolded learning opportunities, doctoral students could be guided and supported in their learning and research journey. By scaffolding the activities as manageable sections, doctoral students are empowered to manage tasks, grasp ideas, and reflect on solutions. In addition, doctoral students will be enabled to take responsibility and implement new and innovative ideas (Friedrich-Nel & Mac Kinnon, 2015).

### **Peer participation**

Peer participation is mentioned as an innovative pedagogy at doctoral level. Authors such as McKenna and van Schalkwyk (2023) and Tshuma and Bitzer (2023) emphasise the relevance of exposing students to collaborative learning activities and opportunities, specifically to

encourage deep learning. In activities such as journal club, colloquia, and student presentations, doctoral students learn to analyse, critique, evaluate, and review other's work. In addition to this, students learn to give constructive feedback, as well as to interpret such feedback.

## 9.10 Conclusion

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The doctoral curriculum is a specialized educational framework designed to cultivate advanced expertise and original contributions in a particular field of study. Within this framework, certain forms of knowledge and types of knowers are both legitimated and valorised, reflecting the norms and values of the academic community. At its heart, the doctoral curriculum legitimates knowledge that is original, rigorous, and methodologically sound. This knowledge is often characterized by its contribution to the field's existing body of research, advancing theoretical understanding or practical applications. Doctoral programs emphasize the creation of new knowledge, rather than merely reproducing or summarizing existing literature. This emphasis requires candidates to engage deeply with their chosen subject, conduct extensive research, and generate findings that push the boundaries of current understanding. As such, the curriculum upholds knowledge that is both innovative and supported by robust empirical or theoretical evidence. Ultimately, the doctoral curriculum legitimates knowledge that is original, methodologically rigorous, and theoretically significant, while valuing knowers who exhibit deep expertise and scholarly integrity. This framework shapes the production of advanced research and the development of academic professionals, guiding them to contribute meaningfully to their fields while adhering to established standards of scholarly practice.

## CHAPTER 9

Pursuing doctoral research is a formidable journey marked by rigorous research, intellectual growth, and academic achievement. However, for students in developing countries, studying at UoTs or Previously Disadvantaged Institutions, PDIs as they are labelled in South Africa, this journey is often overloaded with unique challenges. From limited resources to institutional constraints, doctoral students face numerous hurdles in producing high-quality, applied research outputs. This chapter explores these challenges and suggests strategies to empower them for impactful scholarly contributions. Access to resources such as libraries, laboratories, and academic databases is often limited in developing countries. This impedes the ability of doctoral students to conduct comprehensive literature reviews and access innovative research tools. Related to resource challenges, financial constraints pose a significant barrier to research in developing countries. Doctoral students often struggle to secure funding for their studies, research materials, conference attendance, and publication fees. Inadequate infrastructure, including unreliable internet connectivity and outdated research facilities, hampers the progress of doctoral research projects in developing countries. This affects data collection, analysis, and dissemination efforts. Governments and academic institutions need to prioritise investment in research infrastructure, including modern laboratories, well-equipped libraries, and access to online databases. This will provide doctoral students with the necessary tools to conduct robust research. Scholarships, grants, and research funding programs should be expanded to support doctoral students in developing countries. Moreover, initiatives to waive publication fees and conference expenses can alleviate financial burdens and facilitate greater participation in academic discourse.

Many doctoral students in developing countries face a dearth of experienced supervisors or promotor and academic support systems. The absence of guidance and constructive feedback hinders their

research progress and academic development. Publishing in reputable academic journals is crucial for doctoral students to disseminate their findings and establish credibility in their field. However, students in developing countries often encounter barriers such as language barriers, unfamiliarity with publishing norms, and a lack of access to prestigious journals. Academic institutions should establish mentorship programs pairing doctoral students with experienced researchers or faculty members. Mentorship can provide valuable guidance, support, and networking opportunities, fostering the professional growth of students. Workshops and training sessions on research methodologies, academic writing, and publication strategies can equip doctoral students with essential skills for producing high-quality research outputs. These workshops should be tailored to address the specific needs and challenges faced by students in developing countries. Encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships between institutions, both domestically and internationally, can enrich the research environment for doctoral students. Collaborative projects offer access to diverse expertise, resources, and perspectives, enhancing the quality and impact of research outputs.

All the above-mentioned initiatives, irrespective of their intent, still serve as enablers, rather than motivators and competencies. The fulfilment that a master's or doctoral candidate experiences, after hours of tough studying and laboratory work, presented by a discovery that stretches the horizons of the imagination, and promises tangible contributions to society, is incomparable. The satisfaction derived from solving a complex problem is unparalleled, akin to conquering a formidable mountain peak after a strenuous ascent. It is a euphoric blend of relief, accomplishment, and intellectual fulfilment that resonates deeply within. With each hurdle overcome and every puzzle piece fitting into place, a sense of agency, empowerment, and mastery washes over the mind.



## CHAPTER 9

The journey through the labyrinth of challenges, uncertainties, and setbacks transforms into a testament to perseverance, resilience, and ingenuity. Whether it is unravelling a perplexing mathematical theorem, devising an innovative solution to a real-world problem, or navigating through intricate logical puzzles, the moment of clarity and resolution ignites a spark of triumph that fuels the spirit and reinforces the belief in one's capabilities. In that moment, amidst the exhilaration of triumph, lies the sweet satisfaction of knowing that one has not only solved a problem but has also expanded the boundaries of knowledge and possibility. Also, the social responsiveness of the research outcomes may be an additional sweet spot. It is anticipated that the strategies, concepts, and mechanisms presented in this chapter, will contribute to achieving exactly that.

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## CHAPTER 9

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## CHAPTER 10

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# Assessing the preparedness of NCV Tourism graduates: a case study on the alignment of curriculum and industry demands

*Bianca N Mkhize-Simelane*

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this chapter is to report on the findings of a qualitative study that sought to assess the responsiveness of the National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) tourism curriculum to industry demands. The study was motivated by evidence of shortcomings in translating curriculum guidelines into effective classroom practices, including discrepancies in time allocation for workplace-based experiences and inadequate utilisation of recommended teaching resources. There appears to be an overemphasis on theoretical instruction at the expense of practical skills development.

**Keywords:** National Certificate (Vocational) Tourism curriculum, Technical and Vocational Education and Training, practical skills development.

## 10.1 Introduction

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The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system has been extensively examined within various educational and socio-economic contexts. A notable discussion by Nkomo *et al.* (2016) contrasts the perceived value of universities and TVET colleges, shedding light on the persistent negative attitude towards TVET among certain segments of students and parents. This perception often stems from the belief that TVET represents a lesser educational path, primarily reserved for those who have not met academic benchmarks in more traditional educational settings. Despite this widespread sentiment, the government has consistently invested significant resources into the TVET system, recognizing its critical role within the broader post-school education and training landscape.

The pervasive negative perception of TVET raises a crucial question: What underlies this societal bias? Is it a reflection of the perceived inadequacies in the quality of education offered by TVET institutions, or does it point to a broader need for a paradigm shift in how South Africans perceive vocational education? Ngcwangu (2015) suggests that a deep-seated societal belief equating university education with middle-class career success perpetuates the notion that a university degree is the only viable path to upward mobility for South African youth.

Drawing from my extensive experience in teaching tourism across both university and TVET settings, I am particularly motivated to explore the responsiveness of tourism programs to the ever-evolving needs of the industry. Through this exploration, I am convinced that a detailed analysis of industry-specific requirements can lead to the development of tailored TVET programs that prepare students better for the workforce. This chapter aims to critically assess the effectiveness of South African TVET colleges in producing graduates who are not only equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge but are also ready to



## CHAPTER 10

make meaningful contributions to their chosen fields in a society grappling with high unemployment rates.

The findings of this study hold the potential to inform improvements in the TVET system's capacity to meet industry demands. It is conceivable that some programs within the TVET system are already effectively addressing these demands, challenging the prevailing generalizations concerning the perceived inferiority of vocational education. Vally and Motala (2014) underscore South Africa's ongoing efforts to align the TVET system with national economic objectives, highlighting its strategic role in serving the interests of business and industry within an evolving labour market.

In this context, the tourism sector presents a pertinent example for examining the responsiveness of TVET programs to industry needs. Despite the annual graduation of numerous tourism students from TVET institutions, formal employment opportunities remain elusive for many. This disparity is especially concerning given that a significant proportion of TVET students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, a reality emphasized by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in 2018.

The success of vocational programs, including those within the tourism sector, hinges on their ability to respond to a complex interplay of factors: industry needs, technological advancements, student aspirations, and broader societal dynamics. In an era characterized by rapid technological change, vocational curricula must be agile enough to adapt to the shifting demands of the labour market. Failure to do so risks not only the employability of graduates but also the erosion of the credibility of both the programs and the institutions that offer them. Hence a pressing need exists for TVET systems to ensure that graduates possess the contemporary and transferable skills essential for employment and economic contribution.

In this chapter, I endeavour to interrogate the intersection of TVET education, industry demands, and societal expectations, with particular emphasis on the tourism sector. The core question driving this investigation is whether the tourism studies curriculum National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) offered in South African TVET colleges is meeting the industry's requirements to a satisfactory extent.

The findings and recommendations in this chapter are intended to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the role and relevance of vocational education in addressing socio-economic challenges such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment in South Africa. By closely examining the responsiveness of TVET programs to industry needs, this chapter aims to highlight the critical role of vocational education in shaping the future of South Africa's workforce.

## 10.2 Literature review

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In the realm of education, particularly within the context of TVET, the concept of curriculum responsiveness has garnered significant attention. As societies evolve and industries become increasingly dynamic, the necessity for educational programs to adapt and align with these changes has never been more critical. This chapter explores the multifaceted dimensions of curriculum responsiveness, with a specific focus on tourism education within South Africa's TVET system. Drawing upon the insights of various scholars, this discussion aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how curriculum development can serve the needs of students and the broader economy alike better.

### 10.2.1. Understanding Curriculum Responsiveness

The notion of curriculum responsiveness, as articulated by Moll (2004), encompasses the capacity of educational programs to adapt to the shifting demands of employers, thereby producing graduates equipped

## CHAPTER 10

to enhance economic competitiveness. This concept serves as a vital metric for assessing the relevance and effectiveness of educational curricula in a rapidly changing society. Moll (2004) identifies four primary dimensions of responsiveness: economic, cultural, disciplinary, and pedagogical.

Economic responsiveness is rooted in the idea of equipping professionals across various economic sectors with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the job market. This involves not only preparing students for current industry demands but also fostering their ability to innovate and address future challenges within their fields.

Cultural responsiveness, on the other hand, underscores the importance of recognizing and embracing cultural diversity within the classroom. This approach promotes an inclusive learning environment that supports effective teaching and learning, as highlighted by Laakso and Hallberg (2024).

Disciplinary responsiveness focuses on ensuring that curricula remain aligned with the latest advancements and research within a given field, both locally and globally. This alignment is crucial for nurturing students' global perspectives and preparing them for an interconnected world, as discussed by Nuraeni, Zulela and Boeriswati (2020). Finally, pedagogical responsiveness emphasizes the need for instructional strategies, assessment methods, and student support mechanisms that are tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of the student body. By enhancing the overall learning experience, pedagogical responsiveness contributes to the development of well-rounded, capable graduates.

### **10.2.2. Curriculum Responsiveness in the South African Context**

In the context of South Africa, Fomunyam and Teferra (2017) argue that curriculum responsiveness needs to address the unique needs of students and the socio-economic realities of the post-colonial era. The failure to adapt curricula to the evolving dynamics of society, as noted by Wedekind and Mutereko (2016), poses a significant risk of rendering graduates unemployable and diminishing the relevance of vocational programs. This concern is particularly pertinent within the TVET system, where the student demographic predominantly comprises individuals from previously disadvantaged backgrounds (DHET, 2018).

Wedekind (2016) advocates for a responsive TVET curriculum that considers the needs of students, employers, and society at large. He emphasizes the importance of decentralization in curriculum development, which allows for localized adaptations that are better suited to the specific contexts in which education occurs. This perspective is mirrored by Dang (2016), who cites the Australian TVET system as a model of industry-driven curriculum development. In Australia, competency-based training and the creation of industry-specific training packages have been instrumental in ensuring that education aligns with labour market demands. South Africa's equivalent structures, such as SAQA, QCTO, Umalusi, and CHE are similarly tasked with quality assurance and capacity development within the education sector.

Although Ensor's (2004) study focused on universities, his findings regarding the alignment of degree programs with workplace relevance raise an important question for the TVET sector: Is the curriculum taught in the NC(V) Tourism program truly consistent with the skills and knowledge required in the workplace?

### **10.2.3. Foundations of Curriculum Development**

Defining a curriculum is a complex task, as there is no universally accepted definition. Different interpretations emphasize various aspects of teaching and learning. Pinar *et al.* (1995) note that while a clear definition is essential for productive discourse, achieving consensus has proven elusive, leading to a diversity of perspectives.

Stenhouse (1975) categorizes the curriculum into two components: the intended or prescribed curriculum, which delineates what should be taught, and the enacted curriculum, which reflects what is being taught. This distinction is crucial for understanding the potential gaps between curriculum design and implementation, particularly within the context of TVET education.

This chapter focuses on the tourism curriculum within the NC(V) program, which includes subjects such as Tourism Operations, Client Service and Human Relations, Science of Tourism, and Sustainable Tourism. These subjects provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the various aspects of the tourism industry. They define the skills and knowledge students are expected to acquire and are integral to the planning of both classroom and extracurricular activities. The curriculum also incorporates assessment guidelines, with the Internal Continuous Assessment (ICASS) accounting for 40% of the final grade. The tourism program under study is guided by the DHET.

#### **Curriculum Development: The Didaktik Tradition and Curriculum Theory**

The delivery of learning content in the tourism program can be examined through two distinct lenses: the Didaktik tradition and curriculum theory. Westbury *et al.* (2000) describe the Didaktik tradition as an approach that grants educators the autonomy to teach without rigid adherence to a prescribed curriculum. This flexibility allows

teachers to adapt their methods and content to the unique needs and cultural contexts of their students. This approach is particularly relevant in a diverse society such as South Africa, where students from rural areas and affluent suburbs may have vastly different educational needs.

In contrast, curriculum theory provides a more structured approach, outlining specific learning objectives, teaching methods, and assessment criteria. This framework ensures that the educational process is systematic and goal-oriented, with clearly defined outcomes guiding teaching and learning activities. Despite their differences, both the Didaktik tradition and curriculum theory share a common focus on achieving educational goals, delivering relevant content, employing effective methodologies, and assessing student capabilities.

South Africa's curriculum policies, including the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS), are rooted in the principles of curriculum theory. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) plays a critical role in implementing curricula that clearly define learning objectives and evaluation criteria.

The program requires lecturers to adhere to syllabi with clearly defined aims, objectives, and outcomes, ensuring that assessment tasks align with these standards. However, concerns have been raised concerning the relevance and currency of the syllabi content, particularly in the light of contemporary socio-economic challenges and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

#### **10.2.4. Evolution of the Tourism Curriculum**

The tourism industry is in a state of constant evolution, necessitating regular updates and enhancements to the tourism curriculum to keep pace with industry trends. The origins of tourism education can be traced back to technical and vocational schools, which responded to the

## CHAPTER 10

growing demand within the industry (Wattanacharoensil, 2014). The evolution of tourism education has retained its emphasis on technical and vocational skills development while also adapting to new industry requirements.

The development of the tourism curriculum can be divided into three distinct phases. The first phase, pre-1990, was characterized by limited academic attention to the tourism industry, with only a few universities offering programs in this field. The second phase, spanning from 1990 to 2000, saw a significant expansion in the number of institutions offering tourism-related programs, reflecting the industry's growing importance as a global economic driver. The post-2000 era marks the third phase, during which the tourism curriculum has continued to evolve, incorporating new trends and challenges such as sustainable tourism, cultural heritage preservation, and digital marketing.

These changes in the tourism curriculum have been well-documented by scholars and researchers, including Airey (2004), Lo (2005), Inui, Wheeler and Lankford (2006), and Wattanacharoensil (2014). This chapter will now delve deeper into these developments, tracing the evolution of the tourism curriculum and its implications for the future of TVET education in South Africa.

### **Tourism Education Curriculum Pre-1990: A Global Context**

The origins of tourism education can be traced back to technical and vocational schools, where it was first introduced as part of a broader effort to address the practical needs of the growing tourism industry (Ring, Dickinger & Wober, 2009; Wattanacharoensil, 2014). By the mid-1960s, significant strides were made in tourism education, particularly in Europe, North America, and the United Kingdom. During this period, a pragmatic approach taken by academics in North America and the UK allowed the vocational sector to play a crucial role in shaping the direction of tourism education (Jafari, 1977; Lashley, 2004).

In the 1970s, tourism was primarily associated with recreational activities, and it was commonly taught within the context of recreational studies. Business travel, however, was not yet considered a substantial component of the tourism industry. Studies conducted during this time, including those by Bodewes (1981) and Airey and Middleton (1984), underscored the focus on leisure activities within tourism education, with little attention given to the corporate travel sector.

While scholars such as Jafari and Ritchie grappled with defining the educational scope of tourism, they recognized the need to establish clear contextual boundaries and issues within the field. This led to the conceptualization of tourism as "a study of man away from his usual habitat, of the industry which responds to his needs, and of the impacts that both he (man) and the industry have on the host socio-cultural, economic, and physical environments" (Wattanacharoensil, 2014). This broad definition catalysed further investigations into the unique characteristics of travellers, their motivations for travel, and the factors contributing to a satisfactory tourism experience.

However, as Bodewes observed, the complexity of tourism posed significant challenges to curriculum development. The field was often seen as an application of established disciplines rather than a fully autonomous academic discipline. This lack of disciplinary clarity created difficulties in integrating multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, and trans-disciplinary approaches within tourism education a challenge that persists to this day.

Wattanacharoensil (2014) identifies three primary approaches to tourism studies: multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, and trans-disciplinary. Multi-disciplinary studies draw upon multiple disciplines to address a single issue, while inter-disciplinary studies merge essential ideas and concepts from various fields to inform teaching approaches. Trans-disciplinary studies, the most comprehensive of the three, involve



## CHAPTER 10

the integration of knowledge across different disciplines to tackle complex issues. However, implementing inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches in tourism education requires highly qualified academics and capable students, making it a challenging endeavour.

Before 1990, tourism education in the United Kingdom placed stronger emphasis on academic disciplines than on the industry itself. Courses such as tourism marketing and tourism economics often prioritized core concepts from marketing and economics over content specific to tourism. This led to perceptions that tourism education lacked the academic rigour of fields like science and economics due to its limited multi-disciplinary depth. Nevertheless, the landscape of tourism education began to change significantly after 1990, leading to innovative advancements in the curriculum.

### **Tourism Education Curriculum from 1990 to 2000**

Between 1990 and 2000, scholars in the United States and the United Kingdom made concerted efforts to expand tourism education, driven by the growing recognition of tourism as a vital economic sector. During this period, research indicated that tourism curricula primarily emphasized the hospitality industry, with a strong focus on business-related aspects.

A pivotal study conducted by Koh in 1995 sought to identify the key competencies required in undergraduate tourism management degrees. By surveying 150 tourism scholars and 18 national organizations in the United States, the study aimed to determine the essential skills that tourism management students needed to succeed in their careers. The findings highlighted several critical competencies, including human resource management, marketing, entrepreneurship, communication, interpersonal relations, computer literacy, and hotel-restaurant operations. These competencies were deemed essential for

success in the tourism industry and became integral components of tourism management programs.

Similar findings were reported in the United Kingdom by Airey and Johnson in 1999, underscoring the global relevance of these competencies. The results of the study provided valuable insights into the skills and knowledge required for a successful career in tourism, guiding the development of undergraduate tourism management curricula both in the United States and the UK.

In the early 1990s, the Council for National Academic Awards in the UK expressed concern over the lack of a definitive and holistic definition of tourism as an academic subject. This issue was thoroughly examined by Powell and McGrath (2014) in their scholarly work, which highlighted the need for a more structured approach to curriculum development in tourism education.

During this period, scholars increasingly used the tourism industry as a benchmark for curriculum development, prioritizing industry-relevant skills over philosophical considerations. Koh (1995) suggested that greater industry involvement in curriculum development would complement academic efforts, a sentiment echoed by Middleton and Ladkin (1996). They cautioned against allowing tourism to be defined solely by academic preferences, as this could lead to confusion among prospective students and employers.

By the end of this era, the tourism curriculum remained predominantly content-centric, focusing on specific subject matter rather than adopting a more comprehensive approach to teaching and learning processes (Airey & Johnstone, 1999). Gunn (1998) maintains that the field of tourism began to move towards a multi-disciplinary approach as universities increasingly integrated tourism studies into specialized faculties such as business or social sciences. Furthermore, efforts were

## CHAPTER 10

made in the UK to establish a standardized approach to tourism education, including a proposed new definition of tourism by Tribe (1999). This definition expanded the scope of tourism to encompass interactions among tourists, businesses, economies, governments, communities, and environments, paving the way for the inclusion of non-business aspects of tourism, such as community involvement and environmental considerations, into the curriculum.

### **Tourism Education Curriculum from 2000 to Present**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen significant advancements in tourism education, driven by the adoption of various methodological paradigms. Tribe (2005) identified three key paradigms in curriculum design: scientific positivist, interpretive, and critical approaches. He emphasized the importance of carefully considering methodology in curriculum design, rather than hastily adopting a preferred method. This approach addresses the challenge of defining the purpose of tourism education.

The scientific positivist paradigm advocates for basing curriculum content on verifiable data and testing it through hypothesis formulation. However, this approach may overlook critical societal perspectives, which are increasingly important in a complex and interconnected world.

Interpretive and critical approaches offer alternative methodologies that allow for the inclusion of diverse opinions and perspectives, which may be excluded by the scientific positivist perspective. Inui *et al.* (2006) argue for the integration of sociology and the philosophy of tourism into the curriculum, providing students with a foundation for addressing epistemological issues and developing critical thinking skills within the context of tourism.

By embracing diverse perspectives and methodologies, the tourism curriculum can prepare students better for the complexities of the

industry. The integration of these approaches has led to a more nuanced and holistic understanding of tourism, which is essential for addressing the challenges and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As tourism continues to evolve, so too must the educational frameworks that support it, ensuring that graduates are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities necessary to succeed in this dynamic field.

### **10.2.5. Approaches and Models for Constructing a Tourism Curriculum**

Smith and Cooper's (2000) research highlights the necessity for a flexible curriculum that can be adapted to the teaching context in which it is used, rather than being rigidly bound to a specific set of conditions. This flexibility allows for the curriculum to evolve alongside the educational system and the industry it serves, ensuring its continued relevance.

Building on this idea, Lawton (1989) proposed a comprehensive model for developing a tourism curriculum that integrates various philosophical and sociological considerations. According to Lawton, the curriculum development process should begin with a thorough examination of the fundamental principles and values that underpin the tourism industry. This includes an understanding of the social and cultural implications of tourism, as well as the ethical and moral considerations that need to be addressed. Lawton's model, alongside the findings of Smith and Cooper, provides valuable insights into creating a curriculum that aligns with the needs of both the education system and industry stakeholders.

Philosophical inquiries within this context focus on the educational goals of tourism and the skills that should be embedded within tourism knowledge. Sociological inquiries, on the other hand, address the needs

## CHAPTER 10

of contemporary society, considering the perspectives of all stakeholders, not only businesses.

The concept of a curriculum has been the subject of extensive debate. While some scholars view it as a collection of taught material, others see it as encompassing the entire educational experience. Regardless of the definition, the purpose of a curriculum is to equip students with specific skills and abilities through various subjects or units. In tourism education, experts have identified seven core areas of study, including tourism marketing, industry structure, and policy and management, to create a shared body of knowledge for both the tourism industry and academia.

### **10.2.6. Influence of Ideology on the Tourism Curriculum**

The development of a tourism curriculum in South Africa is deeply influenced by the country's political and social history, particularly the legacy of apartheid. From 1948 until the early 1990s, South Africa was governed by policies of institutionalized racial segregation, leading to profound inequalities among its population groups. Today, educational policies reflect ongoing efforts to address these historical injustices and promote social cohesion, although significant challenges do remain.

To understand the impact of political and social ideology on the tourism curriculum in South African TVET colleges, this chapter explores how these factors shape and inform the curriculum. Apple (2012) claims that education need to be contextualized within the framework of a complex and unequal society, where social dynamics heavily influence learning. Apple argues that mechanisms of cultural and economic preservation and distribution play a significant role in educational systems, often reflecting the broader social order.

Apple's analysis points to the "hegemonic alliance of the New Right," comprising four predominant social, political, and ideological

movements: neoliberalism, neoconservatism, authoritarian populism, and the new middle class. These movements maintain their influence by asserting ideological dominance and leveraging concepts such as religion, inequality, markets, and standards.

In South Africa, the national curriculum is designed to cultivate democratic citizens who transcend racial and tribal divides, promoting liberal democratic values. For example, the history curriculum emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of human activities in the past, helping students connect historical events to present-day social evolution. The curriculum is governed by sixteen principles for democratic transformation, covering areas such as communication culture, arts and culture, human rights promotion, multilingualism, sports and nation-building, anti-racism, gender equality, HIV/AIDS education, equal access, ethical behaviour, adherence to the rule of law, environmental consciousness, and fostering patriotism and common citizenship.

These principles align with Hirst's (1974) seven forms of knowledge, which include mathematics, physical sciences, history, human sciences, religious studies, literature, fine arts, and philosophy. In South Africa, certain subjects are deemed more critical than others, as evidenced by varying pass marks. For example, tourism subjects typically require a pass mark of 50%, while marketing and financial management subjects may require only 40%. In some cases, the tourism program under examination may even stipulate a pass mark of 70%, reflecting different interpretations of the subject's simplicity or complexity.

### **10.2.7. Approaches to Tourism Curriculum Design**

Research by Smith and Cooper (2000) underscores the importance of designing a curriculum that is flexible and adaptable to the specific teaching contexts in which it is used. Rather than being rigidly bound to

## CHAPTER 10

a particular framework, a well-constructed curriculum should allow for modifications and adjustments that reflect the changing needs of students as well as those of the broader education system. This flexibility ensures that the curriculum remains relevant and effective, even as the tourism industry and educational environments continue to evolve.

Complementing this perspective, Lawton (1989) offers a comprehensive model for developing a tourism curriculum that integrates various philosophical and sociological considerations. Lawton claims that the process of curriculum development should begin with a deep exploration of the fundamental principles and values that underpin the tourism industry. This includes understanding the social and cultural implications of tourism, as well as the ethical and moral considerations that have to be considered. Lawton's model provides a holistic approach to curriculum design, ensuring that the resulting educational programs are not only aligned with industry needs but also grounded in broader societal values.

These insights from Smith and Cooper (2000) and Lawton (1989) highlight the importance of a curriculum development process that is both efficient and flexible, catering to the needs of the education system as well as to the industry it serves. By incorporating philosophical inquiries that focus on the educational goals of tourism and the skills essential for students, alongside sociological inquiries that address the needs of contemporary society, curriculum developers can create programs that are comprehensive and responsive to a wide range of stakeholders.

### **10.2.8. Defining the Curriculum in Tourism Education**

The definition of a curriculum has been the subject of extensive debate, with different scholars offering varying interpretations. Some view the

curriculum as simply the material that is taught, while others see it as encompassing the entire educational experience. Regardless of the definition, the primary purpose of a curriculum remains consistent: to equip students with specific skills and abilities through structured subjects or units of study.

In the context of tourism education, a group of experts has identified seven core areas of study that form the foundation of the discipline. These include tourism marketing, industry structure, and policy and management. Together, these areas create a shared body of knowledge that is essential for both the tourism industry and academic inquiry. This comprehensive approach to curriculum design ensures that students are well-prepared to meet the demands of the industry while also contributing to the academic discourse on tourism.

### **10.2.9. The Influence of Ideology on Tourism Curriculum**

The development and implementation of a curriculum are deeply influenced by the broader political and social context in which it operates. In South Africa, the country's history of institutionalized racial segregation under apartheid has left a lasting impact on the education system. From 1948 until the early 1990s, apartheid policies created profound inequalities among different population groups. Today, educational policies are aimed at addressing these historical injustices and promoting social cohesion, although significant challenges remain.

Apple (2012) contends that the education system in public schools is heavily influenced by government actions and decisions. He argues that education must be contextualized within the framework of a complex and unequal society, where social dynamics play a critical role in shaping the mechanisms of cultural and economic preservation and distribution. Apple's analysis highlights the "hegemonic alliance of the New Right," which comprises four predominant social, political, and ideological



## CHAPTER 10

movements: neoliberalism, neoconservatism, authoritarian populism, and the new middle class. These movements maintain their influence by asserting ideological dominance and leveraging concepts such as religion, inequality, markets, and standards.

In South Africa, the national curriculum is designed to cultivate democratic citizens who transcend racial and tribal divides and embrace liberal democratic values. For example, the history curriculum emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of human activities in the past, helping students make connections between historical events and the present. The curriculum is governed by sixteen principles for democratic transformation, covering areas such as communication culture, arts and culture, human rights promotion, multilingualism, sports and nation-building, anti-racism, gender equality, HIV/AIDS education, equal access, ethical behaviour, adherence to the rule of law, environmental consciousness, and fostering patriotism and common citizenship.

These principles align with Hirst's (1974) seven forms of knowledge, which include mathematics, physical sciences, history, human sciences, religious studies, literature, the fine arts, and philosophy. In South Africa, certain subjects are deemed more critical than others, as evidenced by varying pass marks. For example, tourism subjects typically require a pass mark of 50%, while marketing and financial management subjects accept a pass mark of 40%. In some instances, within the tourism program under examination, a pass mark of 70% is required, which may reflect different interpretations, such as the perceived simplicity of the subject necessitating a higher standard for passing.

The following section will explore the theoretical framework applied in this study, providing a deeper understanding of the underlying principles that guide curriculum development in tourism education.

### **10.2.10.Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundations that guided the research, focused on the capabilities approach and Bernstein's (2000) pedagogic device. These frameworks were selected to explore the formulation of a tourism curriculum that is not only adaptable but also aligned with the broader goals of higher education – equipping students with practical, transferable skills.

#### **The Capabilities Approach**

The capabilities approach was chosen as the theoretical backbone of this research, primarily due to its departure from the traditional human capital theory. The human capital perspective often reduces education to a mere tool for economic growth, placing minimal emphasis on the unique backgrounds and learning environments of individual students (Barrett, 2009). In contrast, the capabilities approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between education and development.

As described by Robeyns (2005) as a normative framework for assessing individual well-being and societal arrangements, the capabilities approach considers a broader range of factors that influence well-being, including inequality and poverty. This approach shifts the focus from economic output to the opportunities available for individuals to achieve valued functions, emphasizing personal agency and social justice (Sen, 2005). It prioritizes human flourishing over mere economic expansion – a viewpoint echoed by Powell and McGrath (2014). For instance, employability is not merely about accessing any job but about having the freedom to choose meaningful employment (Bonvin & Galster, 2010).

Institutions and educational structures are evaluated based on their impact on individuals' well-being, with the curriculum's effectiveness

## CHAPTER 10

judged by its contribution to students' capabilities and freedoms (Walker & Unterhalter, 2010). However, the capabilities approach has faced criticism for its perceived focus on the individual, with some arguing that it does not address the role of groups and social structures sufficiently (Robeyns, 2005). Tikly (2013) cautions against expecting the capabilities approach to provide ready-made solutions to policy challenges, emphasizing instead its utility in framing issues and guiding policy evaluation.

Bonvin and Farvaque (2006) raise critical questions regarding the evaluation of TVET colleges through the lens of the capabilities approach. They ask whether TVET institutions genuinely enhance students' capabilities or whether they inadvertently constrain them. These questions depart from conventional evaluation methods, highlighting the importance of considering the broader impact of TVET on students' well-being.

Bonvin and Farvaque's (2010) work underscores the need for a holistic approach to evaluating TVET institutions – one that extends beyond traditional success metrics to consider the socio – economic context and the impact of vocational education on students' capabilities, well-being, and societal development.

To explore these issues further and assess the tourism curriculum's impact on students' capabilities and functioning, this study also employs Bernstein's pedagogic device. This framework examines the relationship between teaching and learning processes and students' opportunities to succeed, aiming to provide insights into how the tourism curriculum can better promote students' well-being and agency.

### **10.2.11. The Transmission of Tourism Knowledge: Bernstein's Pedagogic Device**

Bernstein's (2000) pedagogic device offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how knowledge is transmitted within educational settings. This framework emphasizes not only the content of education but also the processes by means of which teaching and learning occur. It provides criteria, rules, and components that help us understand how knowledge is structured within a curriculum and how it is conveyed through pedagogical practices.

At its core, the pedagogic device addresses knowledge-related issues at multiple levels, from national policies to classroom implementation. According to Bernstein, this device functions as a set of guidelines or approaches that facilitate the transfer of knowledge through pedagogical methods. As Ashwin *et al.* (2012) explain, the pedagogic device helps us understand how knowledge is distributed across society, including the rules governing its production, who can access it, and the various pathways through which different groups acquire knowledge.

### **10.2.12. Tourism Curriculum and the Rules of the Pedagogic Device**

Bernstein (2000) outlines three essential rules within the pedagogic device: distributive rules, recontextualizing rules, and evaluative rules. Each of these rules plays a distinct role in structuring the educational process and influencing the distribution, adaptation, and assessment of knowledge. In the context of tourism education, these rules are crucial in shaping how the curriculum is developed, delivered, and evaluated.

### **10.2.13. Distributive Rules**

Distributive rules determine who is permitted to share knowledge, with whom, and under what circumstances. These rules define the legitimacy

## CHAPTER 10

of teaching roles, the content taught, and the context in which teaching and learning occur. In the tourism curriculum at TVET colleges, the competence of lecturers is a significant concern. A study conducted by the DHET (2016) revealed that a considerable percentage of lecturers did not possess the necessary academic or professional qualifications, raising questions about their ability to effectively shape the competencies of tourism graduates.

Bernstein (2000) explains that distributive rules regulate the power dynamics and social groups involved in the distribution of specialized knowledge. The classification of knowledge is tied to power, with access to certain types of knowledge often determined by one's background or social status. Teese and Polesel (2003) further highlight that students from culturally rich families tend to have greater access to disciplinary knowledge, reflecting Bourdieu's theory of social capital, which links economic class to accumulated cultural assets.

In South Africa, educators undergo defined training programs and are licensed by the South African Council for Educators (SACE). In addition, governing bodies in the tourism industry, such as the Culture, Art, Tourism, Hospitality, and Sport Education and Training Authority (CATHSETA), oversee skills development and accreditation of training providers. These distributive rules play a significant role in determining the skills and knowledge that tourism graduates possess, shaping the tourism curriculum and the learning outcomes.

### **10.2.14. Implications of Distributive Rules on the TVET Tourism Curriculum**

Bernstein's distributive rules influence the structure of the tourism curriculum significantly, particularly in TVET programs such as the NC(V) offered by South African colleges. These rules dictate how the curriculum is structured and presented to students. For instance, the

NC(V) curriculum is designed for students who have completed Grade Nine and are interested in vocational training in areas such as Tourism, Marketing, and Hospitality. The curriculum's content and structure are shaped by the broader socio-political context in which it operates, guided by distributive rules.

The Department of Education regularly evaluates the syllabi for NC(V) programs to ensure that they align with current industry needs and educational standards. As the tourism industry evolves, the curriculum needs to be recontextualized to meet these changing demands. This process involves integrating new technologies, updating course content, and incorporating practical training opportunities to prepare students better for the workforce.

### **The Recontextualizing Rules and the Tourism Curriculum**

Once the type of knowledge has been identified through distributive rules, it must be contextualized within specific educational settings. Recontextualizing rules, which stem from distributive rules, play a crucial role in this process, creating a power dynamic between the two.

Before delving into recontextualizing rules, it is essential to define pedagogic discourse. Bernstein (2000) elucidates that pedagogic discourse comprises two fundamental discourses: one dealing with various skills and their interrelationships, and another focusing on social order. This discourse incorporates regulations that govern the development of skills and their interactions, as well as those that establish social order.

In TVET colleges, tourism knowledge and skills are derived from various disciplines, such as Tourism Operations. These disciplines encompass multiple topics, concepts, and principles that are significant and relevant to the industry. The content selected for students is based on their learning requirements and the level of expertise they aim to achieve.

## CHAPTER 10

This carefully curated knowledge and skills are then integrated into the curriculum, with subjects covered across different modules, from Level 2 to Level 4, each time with increasing complexity and comprehensiveness.

### **10.2.15.Recontextualizing Rules and the Curriculum Design Process**

The curriculum design process involves recontextualizing rules, which determine the content and methodology of knowledge transmission. These rules serve as guiding principles for outlining course objectives and establishing boundaries for subject outcomes, learning objectives, and assessment criteria. Curriculum designers ensure that the knowledge being conveyed aligns with the country's needs and expectations. In the Tourism curriculum under study, the syllabi specify what is to be taught and how it should be delivered.

Bernstein (1990) notes that the educational landscape can be influenced by various factors, including family, community, and peer relations, which can impact its practices. Governments and authorities are particularly concerned with the level of consciousness instilled by the knowledge disseminated in educational institutions. In some cases, excessive enlightenment among the populace may be viewed unfavourably by those in power, as it could potentially threaten their control.

#### **The Evaluative Rules**

The final component of the pedagogic device, evaluative rules, plays a critical role in shaping students' consciousness by transmitting criteria for success. These rules are derived from the recontextualization of existing rules, creating a power dynamic between them.

Muller *et al.* (2004) suggest that students are primarily motivated by recognition and realization rules, while Singh (2001) argues that students respond to evaluative rules by identifying the necessary knowledge and achieving desired outcomes. The process of acquiring knowledge is heavily influenced by the classification and framing of knowledge, as well as by the interaction between official and pedagogic recontextualizing fields.

Students often grapple with their responsibilities and the methods they have to employ to meet academic demands. This ongoing interaction with teachers, knowledge domains, and even societal structures shapes their identities and their understanding of their roles within society.

The pedagogic device functions as a regulator, influencing the levels of consciousness among knowledge seekers. These levels of consciousness are crucial for the production, reproduction, and transformation of cultural norms and values. According to Bernstein, states and authorities exert control over knowledge distribution and the recontextualization process, thereby shaping qualifications, prerequisites, and assessment criteria. Social inequalities are intricately linked to differential access to knowledge, while social stability depends on controlled access to that knowledge.

In the context of tourism education, the pedagogic device offers a framework for evaluating how the curriculum is delivered to students in TVET colleges. It provides insights into the structure of tourism knowledge and the pedagogical practices employed in TVET colleges, helping to ensure that the curriculum prepares students effectively for the challenges of the tourism industry.

The integration of the capabilities approach and Bernstein's pedagogic device in this research offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of curriculum development in tourism



## CHAPTER 10

education. By focusing on both the individual well-being of students and the broader socio-economic context in which education occurs, this approach allows for a nuanced evaluation of the effectiveness of the tourism curriculum.

The primary aim of this research was to assess whether the skills and knowledge imparted through the NC(V) tourism curriculum align with the expectations and requirements of employers within the tourism sector. This alignment is crucial for determining the readiness of graduates for employment in the industry. Given the complexity of this objective, a qualitative research approach was selected, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the dynamics within TVET institutions and the curriculum-related challenges they face.

### **Rationale for a Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for studies that seek to understand how individuals interpret and interact with specific phenomena. As Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow and Ponterotto (2017) suggest, qualitative methods focus on uncovering the meanings that individuals attach to their experiences, while Mahajan (2018) emphasizes the exploration of participants' beliefs and perspectives. In this study, the qualitative approach was chosen to facilitate an interactive and dynamic engagement between the researcher and participants. This methodology was instrumental in gathering rich, detailed accounts of participants' experiences with the NC(V) tourism curriculum, thereby enhancing the depth and quality of the research findings.

As discussed in the literature review, achieving a balance between vocational and academic components is vital for the effectiveness of tourism programs. To explore how well this balance is realized in practice, the research employed customized interview schedules designed to uncover the methods and techniques used in developing

tourism curricula. In the South African context, the tourism planning model must reflect the interests of all stakeholders, not merely those of the commercial sector. This research methodology was therefore crafted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of these complex interactions.

### **Sampling and Research Population**

Purposive sampling was employed; a method particularly useful when the research aims to explore specific characteristics or functions within a population. To ensure the collection of relevant and focused data, the researcher purposefully selected participants who were directly involved in the NC(V) tourism program. These included employers who had hired NC(V) tourism graduates, the graduates themselves who were currently employed, and lecturers who taught the NC(V) tourism curriculum. The rationale for this selection assumed that these respondents would provide data that were both rich and directly relevant to the research questions.

Purposive sampling was also chosen due to the study's focus on a small subset of a larger population. While many members of the subset were identifiable, it was nearly impossible to enumerate all potential participants. Given the qualitative nature of the study, it was important to keep the number of participants manageable, allowing for detailed data collection and keeping costs within reasonable limits.

The final sample consisted of twenty participants: four employers from the tourism industry, twelve employed NC(V) graduates, and four NC(V) tourism lecturers, with each lecturer representing one of the NC(V) tourism subjects. This sample size was deemed sufficient to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand and to address the research questions effectively.

### **10.2.16. Data Collection Methods**

The research aimed to address critical questions raised by Powell and McGrath (2014) concerning the functioning of institutions and their impact on individual capabilities. Specifically, the study sought to understand which capabilities and functions are prioritized by students, how well these are supported by existing institutional frameworks and pedagogic approaches, and how the development of these skills benefits students, their families, and communities. Moreover, the author deemed it necessary to investigate whether equal opportunities exist for all students within the TVET sector, particularly in the context of the tourism curriculum.

To ensure the reliability and credibility of the data collected, the researcher employed a triangulation of data collection methods, a strategy recommended by Maxwell (2013) to enhance the robustness of qualitative research findings. The two primary methods used in this study were in-depth interviews and document analysis.

#### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were selected for their ability to facilitate rich, detailed data collection. This method allows for direct interaction between the researcher and participants, enabling probing and clarification of responses. Semi-structured interviews are highly valued in qualitative research for their capacity to uncover deep insights into individual and group experiences (Welman & Kruger, 2003).

Interviews were conducted at the participants' respective workplaces, allowing for contextually relevant discussions. While an interview schedule served as a guide, the researcher maintained a flexible approach to ensure that the interviews provided comprehensive answers to the research questions. Open-ended questions were used to

encourage discussion and in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives.

The interviews focused on the responsiveness of the NC(V) tourism curriculum to the needs of the South African tourism industry, with each session lasting up to 45 minutes. The interview questions were grounded in Bernstein's (2000) pedagogic device, which, as outlined in the theoretical framework, emphasizes the development of students' abilities and functions.

### **10.2.17. Document Analysis**

To complement and validate the findings from the interviews, document analysis was conducted, further enhancing the comprehensiveness of the qualitative research. The analysis included a thorough review of the NC(V) tourism syllabi from Levels 2 to 4, as well as assessment guidelines. Document analysis is a valuable method in qualitative research, as it often reveals implicit information that may not surface in interviews. This approach provided additional insights that supported and confirmed the findings from the interviews, particularly concerning the alignment of the curriculum with industry needs.

The document analysis focused on several key areas: identifying the theoretical and practical components of the curriculum, assessing the types of skills prescribed, and evaluating the adequacy of coverage. These aspects were derived from the interview data and the literature review, with particular attention to the balance between theoretical and practical instruction, alignment with industry expectations, and the effectiveness of syllabi interpretation and implementation by lecturers.

The careful analysis of these documents assisted in ensuring that the research was grounded in relevant and current data, avoiding common pitfalls associated with secondary data reliance. This thorough approach was essential for constructing a comprehensive understanding of the

## CHAPTER 10

curriculum's strengths and weaknesses in preparing students for careers in the tourism industry.

### **10.2.18. Data Analysis**

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, an inductive methodology was employed for data analysis. This approach, based on Creswell's (1998) framework, focuses on identifying emerging patterns and themes within the data, guided by the study's objectives and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the capabilities approach and Bernstein's pedagogic device.

The analysis began with coding, a process that involves breaking down and categorizing the data according to relevant themes and patterns. Following the method proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), the researcher analysed statements from interviews and documents, identifying information pertinent to the research questions and objectives.

Thematic analysis was then conducted, organizing the data into codes that reflected common issues emerging from the literature review, interview data, previous research findings, and the researcher's expertise in the tourism industry. This methodical approach ensured that the research findings were robust, scholarly, and reflective of the complex dynamics at play within the NC(V) tourism curriculum and its alignment with industry needs.

### **Data presentation**

The data collected was meticulously analysed using an inductive approach, allowing for the identification of patterns and themes that directly address the research questions and objectives. This thematic analysis, informed by existing literature and previous studies, provides meaningful insights into the adequacy of the NC(V) tourism curriculum

in meeting the demands of the South African tourism sector. The analysis was conducted within the theoretical framework of the capabilities approach, supported by Bernstein's (2000) pedagogic device and the concept of curriculum responsiveness. This section presents the key themes identified by means of interviews and document analysis, offering a comprehensive discussion of the primary findings.

The key themes identified for data analysis include:

- Accessibility of Resources within TVET Institutions
- Implementation of Syllabi in Classroom Practices
- Collaboration between TVET Institutions and Industry
- Significance of Work-Based Education in Vocational Training
- Support Systems for TVET Graduates
- Insufficiency of TVET Training in Furnishing Students with Requisite Tourism Industry Skills

To protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants, unique codes were assigned to each interviewee. The four NC(V) tourism lecturers were identified as Tourism Lecturers (TL1–TL4), the tourism graduates as Tourism Graduates (TG1–TG12), and the managers of tourism companies as Tourism Managers (TM1–TM4). The following sections provide an in-depth analysis of each identified theme.

### **Accessibility of Resources within TVET Institutions**

Interviews with lecturers revealed a significant shortfall in the resources required for effectively implementing the tourism curriculum and cultivating the skills demanded by the industry. A particularly critical shortage highlighted was the lack of computers, which are essential for research and project-based learning. Internet connectivity, especially Wi-Fi, was also noted as a crucial resource, particularly for subjects like Sustainable Tourism that necessitate extensive research capabilities. The absence of such fundamental resources was identified by Powell

## CHAPTER 10

and McGrath (2014) as a major constraint on expanding students' capabilities and functioning.

Moreover, recent studies have underscored the impact of inadequate computer literacy among tourism graduates on their readiness for employment. Tourism industry managers have specifically pointed to deficiencies in graduates' research skills, a gap that becomes evident when they enter the workforce. One manager expressed frustration over this gap:

*As a company, we expect students to have at least the basic knowledge of how to search for things. It is always unfortunate that the students we get, we have to train them in basic things that we believe should be taught at school (TM3).*

This deficiency in research skills not only hampers graduates' performance but also leads to poor decision-making and unsatisfactory outcomes in their professional roles. The need for TVET institutions to provide students with essential computer and research skills is therefore paramount.

Lecturers also pointed out the lack of platforms for addressing curriculum-related challenges. While support structures such as program managers, Heads of Departments (HODs), and deputy campus managers exist, their effectiveness is limited, particularly if the HOD lacks expertise in the relevant program area. This highlights the necessity for regular conferences, meetings, and workshops between the education and industry sectors. Such initiatives could bridge the gap between classroom practices and industry needs, as suggested by one lecturer:

*We need to have regular conferences, meetings, and workshops between us in the education sector and those in the industry. The meetings can allow us to find common ground on how we can*

*bridge the gap between what we do in the classrooms while we still wait for the syllabi to be updated. This would need people to be hands-on because the industry is dynamic, and it is ever-changing, so we need to have those conferences and workshops (TL2).*

Furthermore, lecturers proposed provincial meetings among tourism educators as a platform to address academic concerns collectively:

*Another limitation is the lack of platforms where stakeholders can engage and evaluate the tourism curriculum and make recommendations on what themes or topics can be taken out or introduced. The platform can also allow lecturers to challenge the curriculum. There is a general feeling that at times, policies are borrowed from other countries without considering our context (TL4).*

Such collaborative efforts would be instrumental in facilitating curriculum development that is responsive to the dynamic needs of the tourism industry.

### **Implementation of Syllabi in Classroom Practices**

The analysis revealed a discrepancy between lecturers' perceptions of the curriculum and its actual content. While lecturers often claimed that the syllabi were lacking in relevant material, the analysis of the NC(V) tourism syllabi suggested otherwise. The syllabi, in fact, prescribe many of the essential skills that employers seek, aligning well with industry demands. However, the challenge lies in the student's ability to acquire these skills, which is hindered not only by syllabi inadequacies but also by the interpretation and delivery of content in the classroom.

Bernstein's pedagogic device provides valuable insights into this issue, emphasizing the importance of effectively translating syllabi into classroom activities. Unfortunately, the qualifications and pedagogical



## CHAPTER 10

training of lecturers often fall short, impeding the successful implementation of the curriculum. The data indicated that a significant percentage of TVET lecturers lack the necessary academic and professional qualifications, which negatively impacts students' learning experiences.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to invest in the professional development of lecturers, ensuring that they are equipped to translate syllabi into meaningful learning experiences. Additionally, there needs to be a shift away from assessment-centred teaching towards a focus on skills development. The Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) plays a vital role in overseeing the implementation of the curriculum and ensuring that it meets industry standards.

Adopting the Didaktik traditional approach could further enhance curriculum delivery, allowing teachers greater flexibility and creativity in their teaching methods. This approach aligns with the capabilities approach by accommodating the diverse economic, social, and cultural contexts of students.

### **Collaboration between TVET Institutions and Industry**

The significance of collaboration between TVET colleges and the tourism industry cannot be overstated. Gamble (2013) emphasized that a successful TVET system depends on strong partnerships with the industry to ensure that training remains relevant and up-to-date. However, feedback from industry managers during the interviews indicated a perceived divide between the educational institutions and the tourism sector. Rather than viewing training as a shared responsibility, managers saw it as the sole duty of TVET colleges. To train students effectively, it is imperative that the industry takes an active role in the educational process, rather than simply receiving students as finished products.

Young and Gamble (2006) argue that employers should have a say in shaping vocational curricula to bridge the gap between industry needs and TVET colleges. While the industry should not have total control over educational activities, its involvement as a partner is essential. Strengthening collaboration between the tourism industry and TVET colleges would enhance the competency of tourism graduates, as mandated by the syllabi, which often recommend engaging industry practitioners as guest lecturers.

For instance, the Tourism Operation syllabus suggests inviting a Standard Division staff member from South African Tourism to lecture on specific themes, while the Science of Tourism syllabus encourages inviting a corporate consultant as a guest speaker. Formalizing these collaborations through mandatory partnerships between TVET colleges and the industry would ensure that the curriculum remains aligned with industry standards and better prepares students for their careers in tourism.

### **Significance of Work-Based Education in Vocational Training**

WBE is a critical component of vocational training, particularly in the final year of study for TVET students. The ten-day placement in a tourism company provides students with practical, hands-on experience, essential for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. However, concerns were raised about the short duration of these placements. One placement officer noted:

*Through our monitoring, I have picked up that the one challenge raised by employers in the industry is the duration of the placement, which is ten days. This is a challenge because the duration is not enough for the students to be fully exposed to all functions within an establishment (Placement Officer).*

## CHAPTER 10

Research by Busby (2003) supports the notion that extended placements allow students to acquire a broader range of skills, including technical knowledge, communication, interpersonal skills, and an understanding of work culture. The value of practical knowledge gained through prolonged exposure to real-world situations has been emphasized by Webster and Leger (1992), who advocate for the integration of WBE into educational programs.

Despite its inclusion in the South African TVET tourism curriculum, the implementation of WBE has been inadequate. SAQA (2000) highlights the importance of practical competence gained in real-world contexts, yet some lecturers appear unfamiliar with the syllabus contents that guide their duties. To enhance the effectiveness of WBE, lecturers must engage with the syllabus and advocate for the recommended duration of placements.

Maintaining close links with employers, as outlined in the syllabus, is essential for lecturers to stay informed and ensure that students receive adequate WBE opportunities. Although some lecturers may view WBE as adding to their workload, integrating stakeholder engagement into their performance evaluations can mitigate this perception. Ultimately, ensuring sufficient WBE is not just a syllabus requirement but a critical aspect of preparing students for the tourism industry.

### **Support Systems for TVET Graduates**

The interviews revealed a lack of support systems for TVET graduates once they complete their studies. One graduate remarked:

*If only there was some sort of group of all graduates so that we can support each other. As it is, once we graduate, no one cares what happens to us. It's difficult because the companies where we train don't even offer us permanent jobs (TG1).*

Another lecturer highlighted the absence of mechanisms to track graduates' employment status after they finish their studies. Establishing a support system for TVET graduates could provide them with a platform to share their professional experiences, which would be invaluable for both current students and lecturers. Such a system could also facilitate feedback loops, where graduates return to share their experiences with current students, offering practical insights that complement lecturers' theoretical knowledge:

*It would have been nice to have those students come back and give a talk to other students, telling them about their own experience instead of just lecturers telling students what to expect in the workplace (TL3).*

These platforms could help identify the most relevant capabilities for students as they progress through their studies, allowing them to focus on the skills that will be most beneficial in their careers. This approach aligns with the capabilities framework, which emphasizes the importance of enabling students to make informed choices about their education and future careers.

### **Insufficiency of TVET Training in Furnishing Students with Requisite Tourism Industry Skills**

One of the major concerns raised in the study was the identification of outdated components within the syllabi. While it is expected that professional teaching staff can bridge the gap between syllabus content and current industry practices, this is not always the case. For example, traditional syllabi may emphasize manual ticketing processes, whereas the industry now predominantly uses electronic systems such as Amadeus or Galileo. However, the foundational knowledge provided by manual ticketing is still valuable as it offers a basis for learning these electronic systems, a point confirmed by both lecturers and employers.

## CHAPTER 10

Despite some lecturers expressing concerns about students' preparedness for the industry, there was a consensus among employers that graduates possess the basic skills and knowledge required in the workplace. This suggests that, to some extent, the TVET Tourism program is achieving its objectives by equipping students with essential capabilities. One graduate noted:

*The work we did in college, especially in areas like car rental, travel insurance, and cruises, is the same as what we are doing in the industry (TG7).*

Similarly, a lecturer observed alignment between syllabus content and industry needs based on feedback from employed graduates:

*I lecture modules that include foreign exchange, car rental, tour planning and budgeting, hotel reservation, international cruises, and international rail [...]. Based on feedback from former students who are employed by car rental companies, I know that what we teach in class matches the skills required in the industry, except for the digital part and the computerized systems (TL4).*

However, there remains a disconnect between the practical skills emphasized by managers and their implementation in the classroom. For instance, the importance of compiling a practical experience portfolio, as mandated by the syllabi, is often overlooked by lecturers. This highlights the need for accurate interpretation and implementation of syllabi, which is crucial for producing truly industry-ready graduates.

Moreover, both managers and lecturers noted a deficiency in interpersonal skills among graduates, a critical competence in the tourism industry. One manager commented:

*They cannot communicate effectively, they are shy, and their interpersonal skills are not so good. So, we have to help them to open up a bit and not be so anxious (TM1).*

Despite regular classroom attendance, opportunities to develop these interpersonal skills are not being fully utilized. Encouraging more interaction and communication exercises in the classroom could help students build the confidence and interpersonal skills necessary for success in the tourism industry.

Wheelean *et al.* (2015) have emphasized that the capabilities perspective is about equipping individuals with a comprehensive set of knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary for various occupations within an industry. Given the diverse sectors within the tourism industry, the TVET system must prepare its students with the relevant capabilities required for employment. Ensuring that lecturers possess the necessary academic and professional capabilities is essential for delivering quality education. These capabilities, which include a strong educational background, teaching experience, and a passion for learning, are vital for effectively imparting knowledge and guiding students towards academic and professional success.

The next section will delve into the conclusions drawn from these findings, offering recommendations for improving the NC(V) tourism curriculum and better aligning it with the evolving needs of the tourism sector.

### 10.3 Key Findings

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Three critical insights into the effectiveness of the NC(V) tourism curriculum were revealed. First, while the curriculum is well-suited in certain areas, it requires significant improvements in others to better prepare students for the tourism industry. Second, students pursuing tourism studies in TVET colleges were found to lack the essential skills needed for success in the South African tourism sector. Third, there is a

## CHAPTER 10

pressing need to align the NC(V) tourism curriculum more closely with industry standards.

The discussion on curriculum responsiveness and skills acquisition is divided into two main sections: areas where the curriculum is effective and areas where it falls short.

### **Curriculum Responsiveness**

The study found that the NC(V) tourism syllabi cover most of the relevant areas identified by the industry, even though some content is considered outdated. The Science of Tourism syllabus, in particular, was highlighted for its responsiveness, covering critical modules such as foreign currency, car rental, and hotel accommodation. However, the curriculum's responsiveness varies across different sectors within the tourism industry, indicating a need for more tailored training programs that address the diverse demands of these sectors.

### **Skills Gaps and Industry Readiness**

Despite the curriculum's coverage of relevant topics, data from tourism managers underscored significant deficiencies in the practical skills of graduates. These gaps include ineffective communication, inadequate research abilities, and poor problem-solving skills—competencies that are crucial in the dynamic tourism environment. The overemphasis on theoretical learning within TVET colleges has been identified as a contributing factor to these deficiencies, leading to gaps in work readiness. Additionally, graduates were found to lack basic computer literacy and practical knowledge, which are indispensable in today's tourism industry. The mismatch between industry expectations and student capabilities highlights the need for comprehensive curriculum reform and stronger collaboration between TVET colleges and industry stakeholders.

### **Implementation and Interpretation of the Curriculum**

The study also examined how effectively the NC(V) tourism curriculum is interpreted and implemented to ensure that students acquire the skills necessary for the industry. The role of lecturers as mediators between the syllabi and students is crucial in this process. However, challenges such as insufficient qualifications among lecturers impede the effective delivery of the curriculum. The gap between the intended curriculum and its actual implementation further diminishes the curriculum's responsiveness. Moreover, the disconnect between TVET colleges and the tourism industry exacerbates the challenges in developing competent graduates. Strengthening collaboration between these entities is essential to bridge this gap and ensure that the curriculum aligns with industry needs.

Efforts to incentivize industry participation and coordinate various stakeholders can significantly enhance the curriculum's responsiveness. There is a critical need to strike a balance between theoretical instruction and practical skills development, as evidenced by the inadequate emphasis on work-based experience. Prioritizing practical experiences will better prepare students for the demands of the tourism industry and foster a more responsive and relevant curriculum.

### **10.4 Recommendations**

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Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to address the gap between the NC(V) tourism curriculum and the requirements of the tourism industry. These measures aim to enhance graduates' competencies and skills, thereby increasing their employability and success within and beyond the tourism sector.



## CHAPTER 10

### **Adherence to Syllabus Instructions:**

TVET colleges should strictly adhere to the DHET guidelines to avoid misinterpretation or neglect of critical areas such as WBE, practical training, industry involvement, resource utilization, lecturer-industry links, and portfolio compilation.

### **Strengthening Lecturer-Industry Relationships:**

Establishing strong partnerships between TVET institutions and the tourism industry is crucial for aligning the curriculum with industry needs. Regularly inviting industry officials as guest speakers can provide students with up-to-date insights into industry demands.

### **Conduct Regular Workshops:**

Regular workshops should be organized to facilitate dialogue between TVET institutions and industry stakeholders. These workshops would serve as platforms for sharing best practices, addressing challenges, and enhancing collaboration.

### **Regular Curriculum Review:**

The NC(V) tourism syllabi should be reviewed every five years to update content, remove obsolete topics, and ensure alignment with current industry requirements. This review process should involve stakeholders from DHET, TVET management, lecturers, industry representatives, and professional bodies.

### **Prioritize WBE:**

Stronger emphasis should be placed on WBE, with adequate time allocated for practical, hands-on learning experiences. Additionally, lecturers' Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) should be prioritized to improve teaching quality.

**Provide Computer and Internet Access:**

TVET colleges should ensure that learners have access to essential resources such as computer labs and Wi-Fi to develop critical research skills and digital literacy, which are increasingly important in the tourism industry.

**Implement an Introductory Program and Specialization:**

An orientation phase should be introduced to provide students with an overview of the tourism industry, allowing them to make informed decisions about their career paths. Specialization options should be offered at later stages to align students' education with their interests and industry demands.

**Compile Practical Portfolios:**

Students should be encouraged to create practical portfolios in line with syllabus guidelines. These portfolios will help them develop the practical skills needed to succeed in their respective fields.

**Ensure Lecturer Qualifications:**

Lecturers should possess the necessary teaching qualifications, and ongoing professional development should be supported through in-service training programs.

**Organize Educational Tours:**

Educational tours to tourism establishments should be arranged to expose students to real-world industry practices, motivating them to develop the competencies required for success in the tourism sector.

## 10.5 Conclusion and Limitations

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While the findings of this study provide valuable insights, several limitations should be noted. The study was conducted at only four sites

## CHAPTER 10

within the Gauteng province of South Africa, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to all TVET colleges offering the NC(V) tourism qualification. Hence the results may not fully represent the effectiveness of the curriculum in developing graduates with the necessary skills and competencies across the broader context of South Africa. However, the recommendations derived from this study are highly relevant to the TVET colleges examined and lay a strong foundation for future research.

The study also faced challenges related to the scheduling and availability of participants, particularly due to the busy schedules of the stakeholders involved. Follow-up interviews with full-time TVET staff were difficult to arrange, which may have impacted the depth of the data collected. Furthermore, the study would have benefited from the inclusion of additional participants from the research and curriculum development divisions of CATHSSETA, as well as curriculum developers and policymakers from DHET. These additional perspectives could have provided further insights into the curriculum redesign process.

Despite these limitations, the study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of curriculum responsiveness within South African TVET colleges and offers practical recommendations for improving the alignment of the NC(V) tourism curriculum with industry needs.

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## CHAPTER 11

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# Guidelines for decolonising higher education curricula: a case study in health sciences

*Rhea Koch, Jessica Pool and Yolande Heymans*

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### Abstract

South Africa's complex history with colonialism has left its imprint on the Higher Education Institutions. Decolonisation can address historical injustices and create a more inclusive educational environment. Despite the awareness of its significance, many Higher Education Institutions grapple with decolonisation. This is due to varied approaches and resistance. The study reported in this chapter explored how Health Professions educators at a South African university perceive decolonisation. It uses the insights from its findings to develop guidelines to inform the decolonising of health professions education curricula. The chapter is set to exemplify possibilities other fields of study could consider in pursuing a decolonisation project of their curricula.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Decolonisation, Health Sciences, Curriculum, Transformation

### 11.1 Introduction

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South Africa's complex history with colonialism has left a lasting imprint on its higher education institutions, making decolonisation an urgent priority. Despite the growing recognition of its significance, the process of decolonising curricula remains challenging, with varied approaches and resistance hindering progress.

This chapter explores how educators at North-West University perceive decolonisation within their teaching practices and the challenges they face in decolonising curricula. By examining their insights, this study aims to develop practical guidelines to inform and support the process of decolonising curricula. The following section outlines the problem statement and objectives that guide this research.

### 11.2 Problem statement and aim

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Decolonising the Higher Education (HE) curriculum has become a significant global movement which seeks to address the legacy of colonialism (Osman & Maringe, 2019). South Africa's complex history with colonialism has left its imprint on the education system underscoring the significance of decolonisation efforts in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to address historical injustices and create a more inclusive educational environment (Narasimhan & Chandanabhumma, 2021; Osman & Maringe, 2019).

The legacy of colonialism has a far-reaching impact on the field of Health Professions Education (HPE) making it crucial for curriculum transformation to take place in this discipline (Büyüm *et al.*, 2020; Sridhar *et al.*, 2023). Colonialism often introduced western perspectives, practices, and knowledge systems into colonised regions. This historical legacy has had a lasting effect on the education and training of healthcare professionals, shaping their curriculum, methodologies, and

even their understanding of health and illness (Narasimhan & Chandanabhumma, 2021; Osman & Maringe, 2019). Decolonising curricula in HPE is important for several reasons according to Koch *et al.* (2024b). These reasons include the growing demand for culturally responsive and equity-focused curricula, the realisation that current curricula often neglect the diversity in the classroom and the lingering presence of colonial policies and practices in HE. Similarly Hansen *et al.* (2023) emphasised that inequities in global health care have created an urgency to transition towards more responsive and contextually relevant curricula in HPE.

Decolonisation, as advocated by Koch *et al.* (2024b) centres on challenging the status quo and embracing diverse perspectives and knowledge within the curriculum. This pluralistic approach to HPE, endorsed by Baker *et al.* (2021), equips Health Professions (HP) educators with tools for providing quality education within the evolving landscape of curricular reform. Quality HPE, according to Hansen *et al.* (2023), refers to curricula that deliver healthcare graduates who are clinically competent and critically conscious of the context in which they will work.

Despite the awareness of the importance of decolonisation in HPE, it is reported that many HEIs have not embraced the opportunities presented by decolonisation (Osman & Maringe, 2019; Timmis *et al.*, 2019). Le Grange (2019) and Padayachee *et al.* (2018) partly attribute this lack of action to the diverse ways in which decolonisation is approached, resulting in resistance from staff and students hesitant to depart from familiar practices. A scoping review by Koch *et al.* (2024a) revealed a lacuna in existing literature in understanding HP educators' perceptions of decolonisation in HPE. While Hansen *et al.* (2023) have made strides in addressing this gap by exploring how HP Educators conceptualise curriculum principles and teaching practices, there

## CHAPTER 11

remains a need for research into the practical implications of curriculum renewal. Narasimhan and Chandanabhumma (2021) also stress the necessity to extend the application of decolonisation beyond research, emphasising HP educators' engagement and training.

Understanding the driving forces behind HP educators' teaching practices is crucial within the decolonisation discourse, as it can significantly influence curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and institutional policies (Hansen *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, comprehending HP educators' perceptions of decolonisation is essential as it can inform strategies for curriculum transformation. A lack of comprehension of how HP educators perceive and approach the decolonisation of curricula underscores the need for further investigation into their perspectives. This gap forms the cornerstone for informing the process of decolonising curricula.

Hence this study aims to explore how HP educators within the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) at North-West University (NWU) perceive decolonisation in HPE and to leverage these insights to formulate guidelines for advancing decolonisation efforts in the FHS at NWU and similar contexts.

To reach this aim, this study has two primary objectives. First, to investigate how HP educators perceive decolonisation within their discipline. Second to develop guidelines that can inform decolonisation practices of Health Professions curricula.

To achieve these objectives, this research adopted a workshop methodology, providing a suitable platform for fulfilling the research purpose. Nominal Group Technique (NGT) was employed within this methodology to encourage meaningful contributions. To gain nuanced insights into HP educators' perspectives, the study uses deductive coding to guide the analysis of collected data. To develop guidelines to

advance decolonisation in Health Sciences, this research makes use of the Appraisal of Guidelines for Research & Evaluation instrument, AGREE II (AGREE, 2017).

The chapter follows a clear and concise structure. It begins with a framework for framing the decolonisation of curricula in HPE. Following this, it delves into the research methodology, detailing data collection and analysis. The findings and discussions are presented in a combined section, which leads to the proposal of practical guidelines. Finally, the chapter concludes by summarising its key insights. The next section explores the framework that guides our deductive coding.

### 1 1.3 Background: Framing the decolonisation of curricula in HPE

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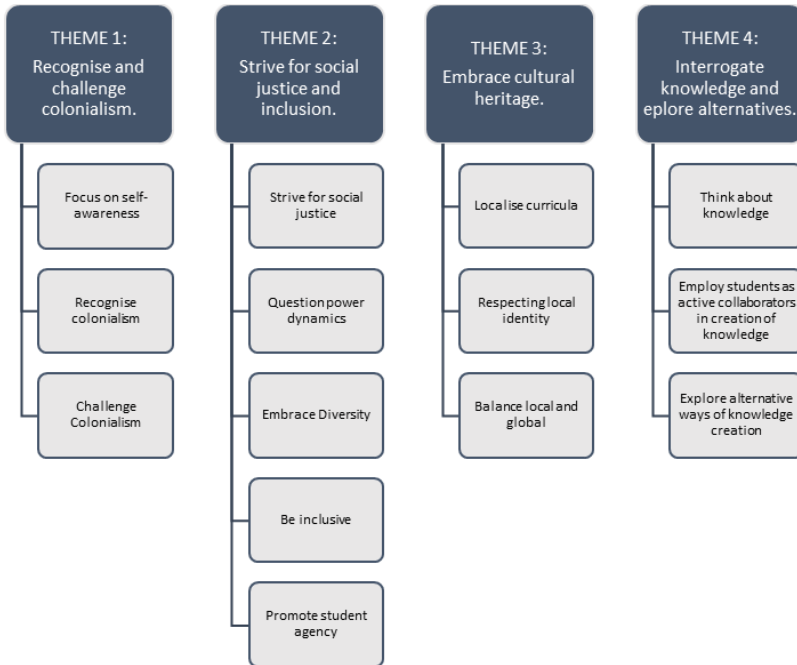
Koch *et al.* (2024a) conducted a scoping literature review to explore how decolonisation is used to drive transformation in HE. The scoping review resulted in the identification of 14 decolonial actions that were presented as an action framework.

This framework outlines four central themes integral to the process of decolonisation in HE. Theme 1 underscores the significance of recognising and engaging with the legacy of colonialism in HE. It suggests practical decolonial steps, including cultivating self-awareness, acknowledging colonial influences, and actively critiquing their impact. In Theme 2, attention shifts to advancing equity and inclusiveness, promoting a curriculum that confronts disparities, re-evaluates power dynamics, welcomes diverse perspectives, fosters inclusive teaching methodologies, and empowers students. Theme 3 revolves around rejuvenating cultural heritage, advocating for measures such as contextualised curricula, honouring local identity, and balancing global and local viewpoints. Lastly, Theme 4 explores the interrogation of

## CHAPTER 11

existing knowledge paradigms and the exploration of alternative ways of knowing, being, and doing. It advocates for critical reflection on established knowledge, the involvement of students as active co-creators of knowledge, and the exploration of unconventional ways of knowledge creation.

This framework aligns with the research objectives by providing a structured approach to analysing data collected from participants. Its emphasis on actionable steps for decolonisation enables this research to explore participants' perceptions in a manner that can foster meaningful curriculum development and transformation.



**Figure 11.1: Decolonisation action framework (Koch *et al.*, 2024a)**

## 11.4 Research method and design

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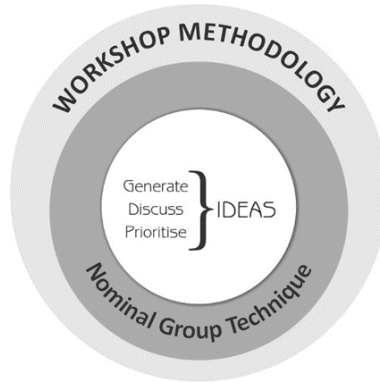
In this study, a research paradigm grounded in social constructivism guides the research approach. Social constructivism recognises that knowledge emerges through social interactions influenced by cultural and contextual factors, aligning with the socially constructed nature of decolonisation (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Diab *et al.*, 2020). Employing a qualitative research design, the study focuses on in-depth exploration, capturing the richness and depth of participant perspectives and experiences regarding decolonisation.

Within this qualitative design, the methodology employed is workshop methodology. This workshop methodology serves as an interactive and participatory platform where participants can engage in discussions, share their perceptions, and collectively contribute to the formulation of decolonisation guidelines. Workshops were selected as a methodology because the participatory nature facilitated a nuanced understanding of participants' attitudes and experiences and the challenges they encounter when aiming to integrate decolonial practices into their curricula (Orngreen & Levinson, 2017).

### 11.4.1. Data collection

To collect data during the workshops, the NGT was employed as illustrated in **Error! Reference source not found.** This technique is suitable for this study because it encourages meaningful contributions from all participants and facilitates agreement on the relative importance of issues, problems or solutions (Tran *et al.*, 2021).





**Figure 11.2: Data collection**

### **Nominal Group Technique (NGT)**

NGT is a structured, small-group discussion method used to generate and brainstorm ideas with the main aim of reaching a consensus regarding the specific topic under discussion – in this study, how HP educators perceive decolonisation. NGT consists of four phases, namely generating ideas, recording ideas, discussing ideas and lastly, prioritising ideas. NGT not only allows for idea generation but allows for in-depth discussion to thoroughly explore the participants’ experiences, opinions, attitudes and beliefs (Tran *et al.*, 2021).

During the online workshops led by an experienced facilitator, five open-ended questions (presented in Table 11.1) were posed one at a time to the participants. Participants then presented their answers on a collaborative online platform, followed by a facilitated discussion to clarify, discuss, and prioritise the generated ideas. The process was then repeated for each question. Once done with all five questions, the participants were asked to do a feedback survey on their experience of the session.

The collected data encompassed the written answers to the questions posed on the collaborative online platform, the transcripts of the workshops and the responses from the feedback survey completed at the end of the workshops.

**Table 11.1: Workshop questions**

QUESTION 1: (a) How did colonisation shape the curriculum in your discipline? (b) How do you consider your positionality as a module owner/ designer/ lecturer, and your impact on your students?
QUESTION 2: In your discipline, how do your practices and unconscious bias exclude and/or include certain groups? (With reference to what you teach and how you teach.)
QUESTION 3: Do your students currently see their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds reflected in the curriculum? If yes, how was this achieved in your discipline and if not, what changes can you make for your students to see their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds reflected in the curriculum?
QUESTION 4: In your discipline, do you interrogate why some knowledge is validated more than other forms of knowledge and what do you do to invite alternative ways of thinking?
QUESTION 5: As a last question, and after all these discussions, what does decolonisation mean to you personally and what does it mean for you in the context of your discipline?

### **Population and sampling**

The study population comprised academics within the FHS on the Potchefstroom, Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark Campuses of the North-West University. The FHS consists of 5 schools namely Pharmacy, Nursing, Psycho-Social Development, Human movement Sciences, Physiology nutrition and consumer sciences.

This qualitative study used an all-inclusive voluntary purposive sampling procedure. Participation in this study was voluntary. The basic principles of ethics: autonomy, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence and fidelity

## CHAPTER 11

were guiding the ethical practices during this research as suggested by Pool and Reitsma (2017) before the commencement of research, the researcher obtained ethics approval from the North-West University Health Research Ethics Committee (NWU-HREC) and the North-West University Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU-RDGC). To safeguard the integrity of the findings of the study, meticulous steps were taken to address data quality, validity, and reliability.

### 11.4.2. Data Analysis

The data collected were subjected to deductive coding using the action framework for decolonising health sciences curriculum which encompasses 14 distinct actions designed to guide the decolonisation of curricula (as displayed in **Error! Reference source not found.**). The deductive coding approach involved systematically aligning participant responses with the predefined actions outlined in the framework. This process facilitated a comprehensive evaluation of the extent to which participants' perceptions and discussions resonated with the recommended decolonial actions. Structuring the data analysis around these predefined actions provided a framework for synthesising the data and deriving actionable guidelines to advance decolonisation efforts within Health Sciences.

## 11.5 Results and Discussion

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In the following section, we delve into the findings and discussion organised around the four predetermined themes discussed earlier. These themes provide a structured lens through which we examine HP educators' perceptions of decolonisation.

### 11.5.1. THEME 1: Recognise and challenge colonialism.

#### Subtheme 1: focus on self-awareness

To work towards decoloniality it is important for HP educators to critically reflect on themselves and their influence on a curriculum as highlighted by Koch *et al.* (2024a). From the data, it became evident that most of the participants acknowledged that who they are does influence how they teach, what they teach, how they engage with students and how students view them. Some of the participants also mentioned that engaging with colleagues in conversation about this decolonial action, created a renewed awareness of their actions and how this can influence their teaching and students' participation.

Drawing from the insights of Padayachee *et al.* (2018), it becomes evident that HP educators should proactively position themselves within the learning environment. This proactive stance involves taking ownership of any biases that may exist. As Rodney (2016) underscores, this positioning is not merely a matter of physical presence but signifies a commitment to transparency and accountability. When educators establish themselves in the classroom, they create a tangible locus for these principles, fostering an environment in which the learning process is guided by openness and responsibility. From the data analysis, it became clear that even though participants are eager to take responsibility for their bias and assumptions, only a few of the participants indicated that they actively establish their positionality in the classroom:

*1:37 I grew up in the sixties and seventies very aware of the differences in living conditions among people... I acknowledge the fact that I grew up in a privileged society during the first lecture session of the module I teach.*

## CHAPTER 11

Further analyses of the data reveal that participants find it important that students are encouraged to also be aware of their own culture and values in Health science fields because that would influence how they treat patients and what treatment options they would or would not recommend. This viewpoint is corroborated by the work of Harvey and Russell-Mundine (2019), who advocate for the importance of reflective practice in enabling students to recognise potential misalignments in their cultural awareness and to view differences as valuable learning opportunities. Building on this, Andrews *et al.* (2020) propose that student activities can be purposefully designed to encourage students to reflect on their own identities. The data displays a commitment by participants to encourage students to self-reflect through activities such as field trips to different communities and hospitals and group discussions about controversial topics such as abortion, surrogate pregnancies, and organ donation. Practical assignments and assessments are also used by these participants to provide students with opportunities to reflect on cultural practices from their own communities. This is illustrated by this participants' response:

*3:31 The current curriculum in Nursing and midwifery does not reflect indigenous knowledge. For example, pregnant mothers use certain herbs or practice some beliefs to enhance labour. So I give students opportunities to reflect on some of the cultural practices from their communities, they then share these with videos and discuss them in class. The intention is to clarify their values regarding these and decide whether they would recommend or not recommend to the clients.*

Added to this, shared reflection with peers, as advocated by Sridhar *et al.* (2023), can provide an internal feedback mechanism. Within this collaborative environment, learners are allowed to contemplate their role and impact in either perpetuating or dismantling colonialism. This collaborative approach not only encourages self-awareness but also

underscores the interconnectedness of individuals' cultural identities within the broader context of healthcare education and practice.

### **Subtheme 2: Recognise colonialism**

When aiming to use decolonisation to transform curricula, it is fundamental to recognise and understand the historical impact of colonialism (Chandanabhumma & Narasimhan, 2020). Recognising colonialism according to (Mbaki *et al.*, 2021) involves looking at the history of a subject or discipline and acknowledging the policies and practices that lead to the depletion of resources. Participants were eager to reflect on the origins of their subject which mostly originated in Europe and the USA as evidenced by the following responses:

*1:3 Pharmacy and science of pharmacy developed in Eurocentric / European, American / Western world. Developed during colonisation as it was part of history.*

*1:54 Started home economics in the USA - train women essential skills as mothers in their homes. Shaped by White women's backgrounds. Later became Consumer Science but still very focussed on foods and fashion in SA. In SA, most consumer scientists are still women.*

Participants agreed that colonisation had a great influence on their respective disciplines. In psychology, participants declared that colonisation is embedded in all the main theories because psychology is mainly investigated from a Western perspective.

Colonialism also had a strong influence in the field of nursing, according to participants who noted that their views of diagnoses and treatment were shaped by the colonised content they learned from. Participants from the subject of pharmacy acknowledged that Western medicine, developed by the Western World is an inherent and essential part of their curricula as indicated by this response:

## CHAPTER 11

*6:2 Pharmacy developed during the time that colonisation was the top of the day. So, it does have a lot of influences in it. So, that is what I meant by part of the history of Pharmacy as we are here now at this moment.*

These observations align with existing literature's emphasis on critical awareness regarding the enduring effects of colonialism within HPE disciplines (Hansen *et al.*, 2023; Sridhar *et al.*, 2023). The participants' responses confirm that colonialism continues to exert a lingering influence on their subjects, highlighting the importance of addressing this historical legacy in HE.

### **Subtheme 3: Challenge colonialism**

The overarching sentiment expressed by participants reflected a sincere commitment to challenge the legacy of colonialism within their curricula. This sentiment is echoed by Bhandal (2018) who emphasises the critical importance of bringing to light the recurring patterns of colonial influence and actively addressing them.

The term *decolonisation*, however, raised concerns among many participants who described the term decolonisation as wrong, very politicised, a horrible word and not a correct description of what needs to happen. Some participants proposed that the term be changed to focus on inclusivity and addressing diversity. The prevailing perception among participants was that if the term were replaced by a term with less of a negative connotation, participants would be more eager to participate and realise the value it could add to their curricula. This perspective aligns with the notion that the term decolonisation may not be the most appropriate choice moving forward, as discussed by (Cloete, 2018). Cloete underscores the ideological and reductionist nature of the term, lending further support to the participants' reservations and their call for a more constructive and inclusive framing

of the curricular transformation process. The following responses illustrate this perspective:

*9:20 I'd like to apologise to you. I did enjoy this workshop. I was very negative about this, but I must tell you one thing: I think decolonisation is a swear word that we need to get rid of. It's a horrible word; it's got a very negative connection, and if one can get a different word to describe what we've discussed today, I believe that everybody will just jump into the pool and say, "okay, let's do it, let's do it", but the minute you hear this word, people say I'm not interested; I don't want to hear it. It's all wrong. So, thank you. You changed my mind about what it includes, but I still hate the word.*

*9:17 I think it has a lot to do with the terminology that is also used. Why would we use the term decolonise, that is a politicised term. So, if we want to get away from that, we should rather say how we become more inclusive, and to be negative, is also never good. So decolonise is a negative term, you want to get away from something, but rather say what do we want to move towards, and that would be more constructive, and I think that will bring people together and help us understand one another, and eventually achieve what we want to achieve.*

Hansen *et al.* (2023) argue that fostering opportunities for dialogue can serve as a valuable bridge between HP educators' perceptions and their teaching practices. They emphasise the need for shared platforms and opportunities for dialogue among all stakeholders. This notion aligns with a recurring theme in participants' narratives, which reflects their enthusiasm for engaging in critical conversations about the concept of decolonisation and its implications. Participants expressed the value they found in hearing the views and ideas of their colleagues while being able to share their perspectives. Some participants noted their



## CHAPTER 11

appreciation for the co-constructive and participatory nature of the conversation during the workshop and mentioned that more conversations on the topic should be encouraged.

Furthermore, hearing the opinions of others encouraged participants to critically reflect on their perception of decolonisation and their level of engagement in decolonial actions. However, many of the participants voiced the need to engage in further conversation and training opportunities to give them a better understanding of decolonisation and present practical examples of how to incorporate different aspects of decolonisation in their curricula. The need to have discipline-specific conversations and training was emphasised as summarised by this response:

*10:6 Workshops need to be for a discipline e.g. Pharmacy. We do hear the other disciplines but it is not all applicable to our context and especially my module. To have a person available or leading the workshop with the knowledge and experience of decolonisation in our discipline and modules to help us meet the standards as expected from the structure.*

Critical dialogues within the context of decolonisation are essential, but it is equally crucial that these conversations evolve from mere recognition to active questioning and critique (Chandanabhumma & Narasimhan, 2020). Data analysis indicates that participants are indeed critically assessing existing paradigms and striving to challenge established systems. Some even mentioned that despite their educational practices originating in developed countries, they are making efforts to enhance these practices to suit the South African context better. Added to this, a few participants mentioned that they felt more could be done to challenge set processes and rules and one participant added the example that international research processes are sometimes in conflict with the approval processes of the local university

and that the research setting and local gatekeepers should ensure that research processes are tailor-made.

Another vital aspect to consider in the discourse on decolonisation within HE is the imperative to question one's assumptions and prejudice. Muna *et al.* (2019) argue that assumptions about students, language literacy and learning can play a pivotal role in shaping an educational environment. Barkaskas and Gladwin (2021) agree and add that assumptions can be effectively countered through meaningful interactions with others. The data gleaned from this study strongly underscores participants' preparedness to challenge their assumptions. A prevalent assumption among participants is the misguided belief that all White students belong to a particular culture and share a specific language, while all Black students are presumed to be associated with a distinct culture and language. This misperception surfaced prominently in participants' responses, emphasising the need to address and rectify such assumptions within the classroom environment:

*2:27 I was acutely aware of the fact that I needed to be inclusive and I overcame this by not assuming that every Black student was of Zulu traditional origin and not every White student was English-speaking. I would always debate cultures and what they meant to them. So made it very personal.*

*2:53 I assume that all White students understand Afrikaans and all other students English, got myself into a pickle a few times*

An opposing viewpoint surfaced as a few participants questioned the need to challenge the assumptions within their disciplines as illustrated by this response:

*6:6 Why? Because it's working. There's a functional profession outside. So, how far do we want to change it, and what will be the impact if we change it? Will it become broken, and then...*

## CHAPTER 11

This viewpoint illustrates the concern mentioned by Matimolane *et al.* (2018) that it might be difficult to engage educators in decolonisation activities due to the perplexing nature of decolonisation and resistance to change.

### **11.5.2. THEME 2: Combat injustice and strive for socially just, culturally diverse, and inclusive education.**

#### **Subtheme 1: Strive for social justice**

An overall commitment to social justice and equity is required when the goal is to decolonise curricula. This commitment requires actively engaging in anti-oppressive practices and working to rectify unjust social conditions, as emphasised by Chandanabhumma and Narasimhan (2020). The participants are eager to embrace this commitment to social justice. They recognise their pivotal roles as module leaders in Health Sciences and are motivated to contribute significantly to fostering fairness and equity in HPE.

Despite this enthusiasm to strive for equity and social justice, not much is being done to help restore imbalances in knowledge and expertise within Health Sciences curricula as advocated by Bhandal (2018). Participants are however acknowledging inequities within their classrooms and some mentioned that they perceive the challenges to be more of a socioeconomic nature than academic or cultural nature. They account for this by not assuming that all students have access to specific resources such as smartphones for example. Based on the participants' feedback it was also noted that participants are aware of and are making students aware of the inequity of the patient or client populations that students will serve as future healthcare professionals. One participant mentioned that in their occupational hygiene curricula, the focus is centred on evaluating and improving worker exposure. Since workers are often from a lower economic class, they have to teach their

students to be mindful of the social and economic differences and how this can influence communication. In nutrition and pharmacy disciplines the importance of realising inequities was also emphasised and confirmed by this response:

*7:13 .. it's easy to maybe get a supplement for someone with a certain disease, but if you are in a lower socio-economic group, it won't be as easy for you to just go and purchase a supplement. You will have to make sure what's in your budget .., even if it's rural, you don't have all those shops near you. What can then be used, and those students can add to a discussion, then.*

Apart from the realisation that colonisation asserted ownership of some knowledge that indeed originated in Africa, not much action is taken by participants to acknowledge past misgivings and protect the copywriting of indigenous knowledge as suggested by (Chandanabhumma & Narasimhan, 2020).

### **Subtheme 2: Question power dynamics**

Is pivotal in decolonial education to address power dynamics that have shaped knowledge, practices and hierarchies within a subject or discipline (Padayachee *et al.*, 2018; Rodney, 2016; Sridhar *et al.*, 2023). The hierarchy of evidence in science is acknowledged by some participants and one participant explained that they are teaching science to students and that the source of science is knowledge that comes from various sources that have been ranked.

Additionally, a notable number of participants drew attention to the fact that it is expected from them to reach outputs that are set by external bodies, for example, the South African Pharmacy Council and that their curricula are dictated by certain rules and processes, making it difficult or impossible to address power dynamics.

## CHAPTER 11

To balance these power dynamics, it is suggested by some participants that to consider other knowledge as part of mainstream science, students must be taught to interrogate this knowledge and evidence from a proven scientific lens. The participants added that educators should assist in the publishing of these sources or strive to find alternative strategies for incorporation into curricula for example community-based teaching activities. This perspective aligns with the views expressed by Narasimhan and Chandanabhumma (2021) who underscore the importance of considering structural barriers, including power differentials and policy-driven inequalities when striving for a more inclusive educational landscape.

### **Subtheme 3: Embrace diversity**

A notable trend emerged as the participants participating directed substantial focus toward the subtheme of diversity, demonstrating its prominent position within conversations and reaffirming its pivotal role in the decolonisation of the Health Sciences curricula. According to Matimolane *et al.* (2018), curricula must be responsive to the needs of a diverse student population.

A few participants advocated for a generic approach to deal with diversity in an approach by which everyone should be treated similarly. However, according to Zidani (2021), educators should not push for homogeneity and shy away from conflict in a diverse classroom. In general, most of the participants demonstrated an awareness and mindfulness of the different backgrounds and cultures of their students. They emphasise the importance of treating all cultures and races with sensitivity and respect and encourage students to treat each other equally.

However, they choose to approach and handle the diversity in their classrooms, participants all agreeing that diversity brings certain challenges that need to be addressed. The first challenge participants

noted is that South Africa truly is a rainbow nation with many different cultures and ethnic groups and that it is nearly impossible to include all the cultures present in the curriculum. Participation is another challenge of diversity as certain participants pointed out. Participants find certain cultures more reluctant to share their experiences or partake in group discussions. One participant mentioned that Black students would rather engage one-on-one with the lecturer because they do not like to share in a group situation. Another participant mentioned the effect of gender roles in certain cultures and how this can influence group work:

*6:20 I also found the Indian community; they are also not group discussion people. If they are in a homogenous culture, good, yes, then they will discuss, but they...especially the woman students, they would rather keep quiet and let the males do the talking. So, it's difficult to get them to engage in that thing.*

Despite the challenges of a diverse student group, participants collectively perceive cultural diversity as something to be embraced. Most participants viewed the diversity in their classrooms as an opportunity to learn. Harvey and Russell-Mundine (2019) agree that diversity presents learning opportunities and emphasises the importance of making students aware of cultural differences. The following response gives an example of how students can be made aware in a diverse classroom:

*3:13 Students are encouraged to participate in class discussion and/or group work with their own identities, cultural examples and background to reach the curriculum outcome, but simultaneously educate the class on diversity.*

The general sentiment was that if students talked and debated their own culture it makes learning much more personal to them and it allows for students to learn from one another. Participants emphasised that it is particularly important to expose students to diverse environments and

## CHAPTER 11

cultures because this will prepare them for the diverse workplace they will be entering.

Cultural competence surfaced as a fundamental aspect in effectively handling classroom diversity (Finn *et al.*, 2022; Nazar *et al.*, 2015). Participants' insights reveal that they believe the lack of cultural knowledge can lead to prejudice, stereotyping and exclusion. Some participants expressed concern that they do not have ample knowledge of and insight into other cultural backgrounds and expressed their desire to learn more. On the other hand, the remaining participants expressed a belief that exposure to different races and cultures, be it through their training or practical work experiences, fostered their sense of ease within a diverse classroom and encouraged them to approach their curricula from multiple perspectives.

Highlighting its relevance, participants mentioned that it is pivotal for their students as future healthcare professionals to be aware that they would serve a diverse health population. Nazar *et al.* (2015) encourage healthcare students and health care providers to engage in cross-cultural interactions to be able to provide care that is fitting for the culture of the patient. Participants from nutrition noted that it is essential to know that food and eating habits are culturally diverse and that socioeconomic factors play an important role. One participant from the pharmacy noted that if you do not take the cultural or socio-economic background of a patient into account, the treatment prescribed may even be counter-effective. Participants aim to achieve this awareness of diversity in a healthcare setting by having open and critical in-class discussions about different cultural perspectives on subjects such as wellness, diet or treatment options. Others introduce culturally diverse case studies enabling students to learn about other cultures. One participant mentioned that they expose their students by

introducing work-integrated learning activities in community and hospital settings.

#### **Subtheme 4: Inclusivity**

Creating a more inclusive classroom environment, as suggested by Finn *et al.* (2022), entails acknowledging the diversity and individuality of every person while ensuring that their experiences, identities, and perspectives are faithfully and genuinely represented. To create an inclusive learning environment, the participants realise that it is important to not stereotype and make assumptions about students' background, socio-economic status and language. The strategy mostly used by participants to promote diverse representation is by using diverse case studies and examples. Some participants mentioned that this enables students to identify with the case study, for example resulting in better participation. One participant did raise a concern that class discussions might occasionally be biased toward the majority of students represented and that the onus lies on the participant to ensure equal participation, fostering an inclusive learning space.

While their goal is to foster an inclusive classroom, several participants admitted that certain practices or actions might unintentionally lead to the exclusion of specific students or student groups. Not knowing enough about other cultural groups can lead to ignorance and the exclusion of certain students, as mentioned by participants. Other factors that can lead to exclusion as listed by participants include the unintentional use of language that is not inclusive or not understanding or accounting for the economic background of students. Other participants realised that their own cultural, ethnic, age and gender bias could lead to exclusion as illustrated by the following responses:

*2:5 Some of the examples might cause you to exclude other groups unconsciously. Another barrier would be using the language of a*



## CHAPTER 11

*particular student to explain a concept. In developing case studies a scenario may be applied to one group instead of generalising.*

*2:3 Due to my worldview, I relate more to that of a Western perspective. Because I relate to the Western perspective, it is easier for me to teach from this comfort zone. When I have to think on my feet when a question is posed or examples are needed, I draw from my knowledge and experience which can exclude students.*

HEIs are encouraged to find strategies to ensure success and inclusivity according to Osman and Maringe (2019). Although a few participants mention that there is room for improvement concerning inclusive teaching methods, others appear to be making deliberate attempts to include all their students in their delivery methods. Certain participants demonstrate a commitment to ensure equal participation and engagement from all students in participatory classroom activities, but they recognise that additional effort may be needed to get certain cultural groups to partake. One participant mentioned that they aim to use humour as part of a lecture presentation, but they caution that humour is not a universal concept and can be misinterpreted by some students.

### **Subtheme 5: Promote student agency**

In literature, many authors advocate for a move away from traditional teaching methodologies to a student-centred approach that promotes student agency (Ajaps, 2021; Cordeiro-Rodrigues, 2017; Goodman *et al.*, 2015). The data suggests a notable shift in this direction as participants display a strong focus on the needs and background of students and empower them to take control over their learning. One participant illustrated the case of female students from a particular culture who may feel discomfort with physical contact in a class involving practical examination skills. They afford these students the autonomy to

determine their preferred approach, such as participating in a female-only group or grasping the intervention through observation or written materials. Another suggestion for empowering students is to encourage critical thinking as illustrated by the following response:

*2:37 The module I teach encourages students to voice their own opinions and allows them to differ from one another without anyone's opinion being right or wrong. They must however be able to defend their opinion.*

Furthermore, a few participants also mentioned their practice of consulting with students when remodelling content and bringing students to the decision table. This approach is in line with the idea of empowering students and engaging them in sharing responsibility for their education with educators, as advocated by Iloanya (2017). Baker *et al.* (2021) further elaborated on this concept, emphasising that transformation aims to empower learners to see the world through a more ethical lens. This empowerment equips them to challenge and change the status quo, ultimately working to establish a more just society.

### **11.5.3. THEME 3: Re-embrace cultural heritage.**

#### **Subtheme 1: Localise curriculum**

When aiming to re-embrace our cultural heritage, the first focus falls on localising curricula. Osman and Maringe (2019) advocate for the inclusion of sources that originated locally from a local perspective. A small number of participants find it easy to incorporate local content since they have local content available (textbooks and academic articles) written by local authors. Others mention they might not have the luxury of a local textbook, but they can supplement textbooks from America or Europe with relevant local case studies and examples. A few participants mentioned that some attempts are being made to work towards the

## CHAPTER 11

availability of local content, but others were concerned about the lack of sources from Africa.

Another challenge to including local content, as noted by Osman and Maringe (2019), is that local knowledge has historically been undervalued and often perceived as inferior to Western knowledge. This perspective becomes evident through the viewpoints of some participants who expressed reservations about incorporating local textbooks into their curriculum. They believe that doing so might compromise the quality of education, as illustrated by the following response:

*9:7 I would not support ... [using local textbooks] in every Discipline. In my Discipline, it would not make sense at all. Quality will suffer. We do not have the capacity, nor the expertise to do that, and the key aspects are universal, the good scientific textbooks are used by several universities across the world because so much work went into the didactical design; the content; keeping it updated, etc. Because the knowledge changes year by year. So, in my Discipline, for example, I would only go for enriching the local context with examples, but not with the local textbook, but it might work for others.*

Added to this, another critique of local content as mentioned by participants is that some disciplines do not allow the inclusion of local content, or that inclusion of local content will not benefit their students, as suggested by the following response:

*9:2 Sports that are inherent to South Africa are not being played outside or on an international level have any financial backing or are being implemented even on the school level, I cannot justify teaching that or looking into that...there is no need to discuss a sport that's not popular. I'm not increasing my students' employability.*

However educators feel about including local content in their curricula, it is important that the content of curricula be reconsidered and the development of new resources be encouraged, as stated by Osman and Maringe (2019).

Sathorar and Geduld (2018) emphasised the importance of connecting course content to the local context by exposing students to diverse real-world situations. In line with this perspective, most participants in this study actively integrate theory with practical applications. Their strategies include using relevant and up-to-date South African examples, incorporating case studies from local clinics or hospitals, organising field trips, and designing assignments that involve interviews with community members on health-related issues.

### **Subtheme 2: Respecting local identity**

Various authors point out that curricula can become more culturally relevant and enriched when infused with indigenous knowledge and perspectives (Mheta *et al.*, 2018; Van der Westhuizen *et al.*, 2017). In the data, however, little focus was placed on the creation of opportunities to recognise, develop and protect culture-based theories. One individual cautioned that if Indigenous knowledge is to be included in curricula it should be proven scientifically. They give the following suggestions:

*7:22 ...if we want to teach this [traditional medicine] to our students, we now need to then interrogate those systems, because you cannot teach what has not yet been proven from our lenses. And so, it will be difficult to bring those into mainstream science and education, ... Probably, we must start helping them to publish their sources of knowledge or maybe have an alternative way of bringing them into the curriculum in terms of maybe community-based teaching and learning, and activities.*

## CHAPTER 11

The celebration of local identity is not widespread among the responses, but it is heartening to observe a subset of responses shifting their focus to proudly emphasise their local identities as illustrated by the following response:

*5:22 I am proud to contribute to African content. It is like Africa is standing up and saying: Here am I! Take note. I love it.*

### **Subtheme 3: Balancing local and global**

Matimolane *et al.* (2018) highlight educators' awareness that curricula must extend beyond local boundaries to be globally relevant. Participants, as observed in the data, have developed strategies to achieve a balance between local and global perspectives. Even when using international textbooks, they integrate local examples and case studies to provide a local angle. In various fields, participants stress the importance of reconciling diverse knowledge and viewpoints as part of the educational foundation. For example, dermatology, addresses differences in skin rashes between White and Black individuals, emphasising real-world applicability over textbook depictions. Furthermore, participants navigate culturally sensitive topics such as Body Mass Index, gender dynamics, and nuanced concepts for example 'competition' with a balanced approach, ensuring a comprehensive understanding for their students.

To close the gap between Western and indigenous approaches it is valuable to seek active partnerships with relevant organisations and HEIs (Mheta *et al.*, 2018; Van der Westhuizen *et al.*, 2017; Witthuhn & Le Roux, 2017). While most participants have not yet considered such partnerships, a few participants did mention their efforts or intentions to form partnerships. One participant elaborated on a partnership with a Zambian University and highlighted the value of visiting and experiencing the cultural interaction there. According to this participant it opened his eyes and made him realise that to achieve the same goal,

the application needs to be different in different settings with different cultures. Another participant voiced the intention to involve stakeholders in the development of more specific case- and content-specific scenarios.

#### **11.5.4. THEME 4: Challenge conventional knowledge and explore alternatives**

##### **Subtheme 1: Think about knowledge**

From a decolonising perspective, educators need to consider the historical and contextual nature of knowledge and teach it accordingly (Sathorar & Geduld, 2019). The data indicates that participants reflect on the fundamental nature of knowledge. Responses indicate an overall awareness that knowledge is pluriverse and shaped by diverse cultural, historical, and contextual factors. Specific examples mentioned by participants include the different understanding of concepts such as obesity, which is perceived to be a health risk for some and for others a sign of prosperity. This is illustrated by this metaphor from one of the participants:

*9:22 I am imagining myself as being on a lane, and this lane is towards a certain direction or destination, and I'm on a scientific lane, because of the knowledge that is already been discovered and validated, and however, to get to that destination, other lanes are also as valid, but they have not maybe... They were not used or validated. However, they can be explored so long as they reach the final destination, and for me, it's about incorporating inclusivity and reaching the same destination.*

While many participants acknowledge the pluriversal nature of knowledge, another group holds the belief that there is only one correct way. They mention that they teach hard science that is evidence-based or dictated by law. One participant voiced a strong opinion against non-

## CHAPTER 11

scientific knowledge and posed the question as to whether academia is only considering the pluriversal nature of knowledge due to political pressure. He continues with the statement that scientific knowledge is the essence of a university in his view and expresses concern about attempts to incorporate knowledge that has not been scientifically proven.

Within the discourse of decolonisation, educators should question the content and knowledge they teach and be willing to challenge their assumptions (Rodney, 2016). From the data, it seems that some attempts are being made to question current knowledge systems. A few of the participants articulated that even though theories are old, it is currently being questioned and debated in certain fields. A participant mentioned that in the field of psychology, there has been an update (TR) to the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) 5 version to specifically include aspects of culture, racism, and discrimination. Another participant stated that through engagement with the topic of decolonisation, they realised that they need to “go back to the drawing board for certain things” (9:13) but that it is not wrong to revert to what worked better in the past.

Zappas *et al.* (2021) advise that a decolonised curriculum must acknowledge multiple ways of thinking about the central problems in the field and not rely on a single authoritative voice. A prevailing sentiment among participants is that although most realise the importance of making space for other knowledges, it is not always easy to do so. Again, the example of obesity was mentioned where patients did not want to lose weight because weight loss is in some cultures linked to being HIV positive. This proposes a problem as the following participant explained:

*6:9 ... they don't want to be stigmatised as having HIV. So, how do you now, from a Western perspective, tell the community or*

*participants what you believe, is wrong? Who am I to say to them no, it's wrong what you believe; you have to believe this and this and this?*

Many participants expressed doubts about the validity of incorporating Indigenous knowledge, feeling pressured to do so. Some noted the significance of scrutinising this knowledge but emphasised the need for scientific validation to support its inclusion. Others pointed out that colonisation has not allowed traditional medicines to be considered and that even if it is still considered unscientific, it may indeed have an impact on therapeutic outcomes when used together with allopathic medicine. In response, participants noted that they must educate students in fields like pharmacy, emphasising their responsibility for patient outcomes and the need for scientific evidence to justify their recommendations for medicines or treatments.

Participants agree on the fact that if current knowledge is to be interrogated it should be done through scientific research. Some mention that it should be borne in mind that research-focused postgraduate teaching and learning is context-specific and that it will be beneficial if the research setting and local gatekeepers ensure that research processes are tailor-made. They mention that there are instances where international research processes conflict with that of the local university processes.

### **Subtheme 2: Employ students as collaborators in the creation of knowledge**

In a decolonial classroom the knowledge and experience a student brings to the classroom should be accounted for and built upon (Sathorar & Geduld, 2018). According to Baker *et al.* (2021), the prior knowledge of students should be a key consideration in curriculum development and effective teaching. From the data analysis, it is evident that participants do realise the value of engaging with the lived realities



## CHAPTER 11

of their students. Some participants highlighted the importance of realising that prior knowledge differs and that one should not assume that all students have prior knowledge of a certain concept. Strategies applied by participants included the careful consideration of students' backgrounds and having students bring their examples and experiences to the classroom as a starting point for discussion and peer learning. Using students' first language can also, according to the participants, demonstrate to students that they can be comfortable in the classroom and participate with the knowledge they possess.

There is a shared understanding that peer learning is beneficial and that students should actively participate in the learning process (Zappas *et al.*, 2021). From the data, it became evident that participants understand the value of students learning from each other. Much effort is noted by participants to create spaces where all students can contribute and feel comfortable sharing their experiences through open discussions. Acknowledging the value of students' contributions to the creation of knowledge can encourage critical thinking and self-directed learning.

*8:5 The start of the semester is very difficult. However, as we progress, and you start to engage them... Being culturally sensitive for me, means I acknowledge my students. I value their input and participation in my class, and I acknowledge them, even if the answers are wrong, I do not make a fuss about it. We learn from that as well.*

When theories are put into practice it can make students aware of their positionality and make them aware that knowledge always originates from a specific context (Andrews *et al.*, 2020). Some participants mention the success of work integrating learning (WIL) activities in community and hospital settings. According to these participants exposing students to real-life situations and people confronts them with

the reality of cultural differences in people and organisations and that it is required of them to deal with these differences sensitively and creatively. This is illustrated by the following example:

*3:10 One of the assessments for our postgrad students is to do a group assignment. However, they are required to choose a resource-deprived community. Then they have to talk to community members and identify a relevant health-related issue. Then working alongside the community, they have to come up with a solution to the health problem that is relevant to the community. It is always interesting to see the reality kick in when the students realise that their ideas of a solution are neither culture-sensitive nor relevant for the particular community. In this group work, they learn about their peers as well as the community they work in.*

### **Subtheme 3: Explore alternative ways of knowledge creation**

A research-based approach to decolonisation can be useful in the decolonisation discourse according to Mbaki *et al.* (2021), but the participants did not focus very much on the inclusiveness of their research environment.

They did however aim to employ decolonial teaching methods by being culturally sensitive, giving students opportunities to contribute and encouraging groupwork activities and class discussions. While literature suggests that local delivery methods should be used in a decolonial curriculum (Ajaps, 2021), the absence of such practices becomes apparent in the data. One participant mentioned that they tried to incorporate trans-language, but did not have much success:

*9:10 I even went as far as to let them explain the scientific concepts to each other in their native language, and they said to me straight, this is difficult; they'd rather do English. I mean, it's*

*not just the translation. That has been well-established. Subtheme 2: respecting local identity*

Consequently, there are many creative methods mentioned in the literature that remain mostly untapped, for example, traditional forms of expression such as music or storytelling, or activities for example playful learning (Cassim, 2020), multilingual classroom talk (Mheta *et al.*, 2018), or pedagogical talking circles (Barkaskas & Gladwin, 2021).

Assessment in a decolonial curriculum should display the commitment to decolonisation (Laing, 2021; Mbaki *et al.*, 2021). Initially, participants mentioned some resistance to adapting assessment strategies to cater for diverse students but then realised that they are currently using various assessment strategies such as presentations in class, practical exams and oral examinations.

### 11.6 Guidelines for advancing decolonisation

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It became evident from the data that most participants feel positive about decolonisation, and they want to engage in conversations about the concept. However, they highlighted the need for clear and practical guidance to structure these conversations and their transformative actions, as illustrated by the following response:

*6:8 I've been trained in a specific way. It's not to say you can't change. I can change, but then I will need to adapt whatever I'm doing on the curriculum side, and that is the big question, how must I do it, and somebody can assist me...can assist us there.*

To develop guidelines to inform the decolonisation of Health Sciences curricula, this research makes use of the Appraisal of Guidelines for Research & Evaluation instrument (AGREE II) (AGREE, 2017). This instrument, comprising six domains, provides a strategy for the development of the guidelines and contributes to validity. Table 11.2

describes the structure and content of the AGREE II instrument and how the guidelines developed align with the criteria of the instrument.

**Table 11.2: Aligning guidelines with AGREE II domains**

<b>Structure and content of AGREE II</b>	<b>How the guidelines align with AGREE II</b>
<p><b>Domain 1 Scope and Purpose:</b> The overall aim, questions and target population.</p>	<p>The guidelines presented in this chapter effectively define their scope. They focus on recognising colonialism, striving for social justice and inclusion, and embracing cultural heritage within HPE. This aligns with the emphasis on a clear objective and scope as outlined in AGREE II.</p>
<p><b>Domain 2 Stakeholder involvement:</b> Appropriateness of stakeholders and representative of intended users</p>	<p>This chapter presents a rigorous methodology that actively involves HP educators and their diverse perspectives, demonstrating an engaged stakeholder approach, which is in line with AGREE II principles emphasising stakeholder involvement.</p>
<p><b>Domain 3 Rigour of Development:</b> The process is used to gather and synthesise evidence and methods to formulate and update recommendations.</p>	<p>Despite the clinical orientation of the AGREE II instrument, the guidelines within this chapter incorporate a suitable methodology. The perspectives of HP educators were grounded in relevant literature on decolonisation, affirming the strength of the development process, and aligning with the principles of AGREE II.</p>
<p><b>Domain 4 Clarity of Presentation:</b> Language, structure and format of guidelines</p>	<p>The guidelines are well-structured and presented in a clear and specific manner. The language used is accessible and understandable, ensuring that HP educators can easily grasp the concepts and strategies outlined. This aligns with the AGREE II principles for clarity of presentation.</p>
<p><b>Domain 5 Applicability:</b> Barriers, facilitators, strategies and resource</p>	<p>While offering valuable strategies, the chapter also highlights the challenges that HP educators may face in the process of decolonisation. Notably, it addresses the common challenge of</p>

## CHAPTER 11

implications for applying guidelines	not knowing how to decolonise and the absence of strategies. By providing a concrete strategy, the guidelines effectively address this major barrier, aligning with AGREE II principles of enhancing the applicability of guidelines by addressing practical challenges
<b>Domain 6 Editorial Independence:</b> Recommendations not unduly biased with competing interests	It is important to note that the authors did not receive any external funding. This underscores the editorial independence of the guidelines presented, aligning with AGREE II principles of editorial independence.

The guidelines presented in Table 11.3 offer concrete actions for HP educators to recognise the impact of colonialism, promote social justice and inclusion, embrace cultural heritage, and explore alternative ways of knowing.

**Table 11.3: Guidelines for decolonising curricula**

RECOGNISE COLONIALISM	STRIVE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INCLUSION
<p><b>Reflect on Cultural Biases:</b> Regularly assess your own cultural biases and how they influence teaching, content choices, and interactions with students.</p> <p><b>Share Background:</b> Begin courses/modules by sharing your background, experiences, and perspectives with students.</p> <p><b>Encourage Reflection:</b> Include reflective activities for students to critically examine their</p>	<p><b>Commit to Social Justice:</b> Highlight marginalised groups' contributions, integrate case studies, and showcase social change instances.</p> <p><b>Challenge Injustice:</b> Review materials, assessments, and classroom dynamics for biases, engaging students in discussions about injustice.</p> <p><b>Address Power Dynamics:</b> Understand power dynamics and their impact on your disciple. Strive for a balanced distribution of power.</p>

identities, experiences, and backgrounds.

**Understand Discipline History:**

Reflect on the history of your discipline and how it shapes your teaching and content.

**Explore Colonial Influence:**

Research how colonialism has shaped your specific discipline, including theories, methodologies, and perspectives.

**Challenge colonialism:**

Identify and address colonial legacies in your curriculum and engage in critical conversations to challenge them.

**Advocate for Change:**

Assess and advocate for changes in teaching and research systems to better serve the community.

**Respect Cultural Differences:**

Be aware of students' cultural diversity, foster open discussions, and respect their backgrounds.

**Embrace Diversity:**

Use student diversity to enrich learning. Encourage collaborative activities that leverage their varied backgrounds.

**Pursue Cultural Knowledge:**

Deepen understanding of represented cultures to better address students' needs.

**Cultural Awareness:**

Teach students how diverse backgrounds impact effective patient care.

**Foster Inclusive Environment:**

Promote diverse representation and eliminate bias in course materials, encouraging all perspectives.

**Encourage Participation:**

Employ methods that value student participation and contribution.

**Student Involvement:**

Involve students in shaping the curriculum and decisions for a collaborative learning environment.

EMBRACE CULTURAL HERITAGE	INTERROGATE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPLORE ALTERNATIVES
<p><b>Reflect Local Perspectives:</b> Incorporate materials reflecting local perspectives, experiences, and culture into the curriculum.</p> <p><b>Connect to Community:</b> Show how concepts relate to the local environment, enhancing student engagement.</p> <p><b>Cultural Pedagogies:</b> Use teaching methods resonating with students' cultural backgrounds.</p> <p><b>Safeguard Indigenous Insights:</b> Prioritise local knowledge and Indigenous perspectives, acknowledging their significance.</p> <p><b>Celebrate Local Culture:</b> Infuse curriculum with local pride and reject colonial superiority.</p> <p><b>Balance Local and Global:</b> Balance local and global perspectives. Highlight unique contributions of local universities within the curriculum.</p> <p><b>Bridge Western and Indigenous Approaches:</b> Collaborate for diverse perspectives, enhancing cross-cultural understanding.</p>	<p><b>Diverse Origins of Knowledge:</b> Teach students the diverse origins of knowledge to understand sources and context.</p> <p><b>Foster Critical Inquiry:</b> Question taught knowledge, methods, and assumptions. Encourage open exploration and open-mindedness.</p> <p><b>Build on Prior Knowledge:</b> Encourage students to build on their existing knowledge for enriched discussions.</p> <p><b>Co-Create Knowledge:</b> Empower students to shape knowledge through collaboration and peer learning.</p> <p><b>Practical Application:</b> Relate knowledge to real-life contexts for practical skill development.</p> <p><b>Research Environment:</b> Create welcoming spaces for diverse individuals, encouraging open collaboration.</p> <p><b>Decolonial Methods:</b> Incorporate creative and innovative teaching approaches.</p> <p><b>Diverse Assessment Strategies:</b> Explore assessment methods accommodating different learning styles and perspectives.</p>

## 11.7 Conclusion

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The findings from this study indicate a significant shift in participants' perceptions of decolonisation, particularly when informed discourse and structured guidance were made available. This study aimed to explore HP educators' perspectives on decolonisation in HPE to propose practical guidelines for advancing decolonisation efforts. These guidelines, structured around a collaborative approach with HP educators, bridge the gap between theory and practice.

HP educators exhibited a more favourable disposition toward decolonisation when they possessed a deeper understanding of what the concept entails. This underscored the crucial role of informed discourse in shaping perspectives. Importantly, their collective desire for a well-structured plan of action underscored the need for practical steps in advancing decolonisation efforts.

The derived guidelines align seamlessly with the FHS mission of producing health care professionals capable of addressing South Africa's diverse healthcare landscape. These guidelines facilitate the enhancement of cultural competency and social consciousness among HP educators, fostering the development of a healthcare workforce attuned to the evolving needs of the nation. Providing a guided approach to decolonisation promotes responsive curriculum transformation, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and socially conscious HE environment.

## 11.8 Limitations

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It is essential to consider the limitations of this study. The research was confined to HP educators within the FHS at the NWU, potentially limiting the generalisability of the findings. Added to this, the small



## CHAPTER 11

sample size may not fully represent the entire academic population, and the qualitative nature of the study might introduce researcher bias. For future research, addressing these limitations is paramount. Rigorously testing and refining the guidelines can contribute to their effectiveness and applicability in diverse educational contexts.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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North-West University. In her role, she is responsible for the coordination and implementation of initiatives, including the development of a scholarly approach to teaching and learning (SoTL), enabling discipline/subject-based teaching-focused communities of practice, promoting research-led teaching development workshops and promoting knowledge production and knowledge sharing about university teaching and learning. She has completed her PhD in education, and her research interests include curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation. More recently, her research focus has shifted to the development of academics as university teachers. Publications include book chapters, refereed journal articles, non-refereed journal articles, and book reviews. She is actively involved as a reviewer for conference abstracts and proceedings and a keynote speaker. She is the chief editor for two book publications: *A Scholarly Approach to Student Success in Higher Education* and *A Scholarly Approach to Student Success in Higher Education: Transformative Pedagogies*. She is also actively involved as a reviewer for conference abstracts and proceedings and a keynote speaker. As a senior lecturer, she acts as a mentor for junior academics. She has experience in postgraduate supervision and has reviewed postgraduate studies. In addition, she serves on the HPEd Scientific Committee (Faculty of Health Sciences, CHPE). One of her key responsibilities is to critically evaluate scientific research proposals within the Health Science Education/SoTL field to obtain ethical clearance for SoTL projects. Furthermore, she provides valuable guidance and mentorship, contributing significantly to the growth and development of Health Professions Educators and researchers in the field.

**Rhea Koch** is currently appointed as the Academic Programmes Coordinator at the Centre for Higher Education Professional Development (CHEPD) within North-West University's Faculty of Education. With a solid background in academic printing and publishing,

## CONTRIBUTORS

she returned to academia in 2020 as an academic developer in NWU's Faculty of Health Sciences, where she guided a project to decolonise health sciences curricula. This work informed her PhD in Health Sciences Education, where she developed practical guidelines for decolonising curricula. Her research interests encompass a range of interdisciplinary areas that reflect her commitment to advancing education in a dynamic, evolving context. Her work in publishing is driven by a focus on enhancing the accessibility and impact of academic knowledge through innovative dissemination strategies. Additionally, she is passionate about leveraging technology to create more effective and inclusive learning environments. She is also dedicated to rethinking traditional education models, advocating for pedagogical practices that are responsive to the needs of diverse learners in higher education.

**Yolande Heymans** is an Associate Professor in the Centre for Health Professions Education, Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University. As module coordinator, she co-teaches an aligned, undergraduate module with 1500 students within an online modality. Her main research focuses on health professions education in the higher education context, specifically referring to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, enhancing student engagement, interprofessional collaborative learning, large class teaching, online learning, and authentic pedagogy. Yolande supervises postgraduate students in health professions education, and publications include journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings.

**Papi Lemeko** is a dedicated scholar specializing in Language Practice, with a focus on Intercultural Studies and Onomastics. Holding a Master of Communication in Language Practice from Central University of Technology, Free State. He has contributed significantly to the academic community through research publications: The influence of Afrikaans on naming among the Basotho of South Africa and Online Teaching and

Learning Experiences of Higher Education Lecturers and Students in the COVID-19 Era: A Leap to Digital Pedagogies. In addition to research, He is committed to education and fostering a collaborative academic environment. His teaching philosophy emphasizes that all children are unique and must have a stimulating educational environment where they can grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. It is his desire to create this type of atmosphere where students can meet their full potential. He provides a safe environment where students are invited to share their ideas and take risks. Moreover, he continues to push the boundaries of Language Practice and Media Studies striving to make impactful contributions to both academic knowledge and practical applications in terminology development.

**Mochina Mphuthi** is an eLearning Support Officer at the Unit for E-learning and Educational Technologies. He is also a part-time lecturer specializing in Economic and Management Sciences, Economics Education, and Academic Literacy. He holds an Honours degree in Education Management and has research interests in pre-service teachers, curriculum practice, eLearning and educational technology, and transformation in higher education. He has published numerous articles and book chapters and presented at national and international conferences.

**Maele Maria Glyndwyr Mononyane** is an esteemed English teacher at Petunia High School in the greater Mangaung area of Bloemfontein. Currently, she is completing her master's dissertation at the Central University of Technology. Ms. Mononyane has presented at various local and international education conferences, showcasing her expertise and commitment to the field. She has also participated in the Columba Leadership Academy, where she has supported the development of young leaders. In addition, she is a renowned conflict resolution practitioner within her community, particularly in her work with young

## CONTRIBUTORS

people. She is also an active member of the Scholarship of Sustainable Curriculum Practice (SSuCP). A support group for postgraduate students pioneered by Professor Molaodi Tshelane.