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African identity and curriculum transformation at universities in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper argues for the notion of African identity to be placed at the centre of creating a new African university as part of the education decolonisation project. Defining the African university does not mean a total negation of Western ideas and epistemologies, but rather the foregrounding of African identity, traditions and culture. The paper recognises that Africa is part of a global economy, hence African university curricula must (among other phenomena) be responsive to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), pandemics and climate change. Drawing on recent African identity-driven curriculum transformation developments at four South African universities, the paper recognises differences in institutional initiatives, some with detailed curriculum transformation plans and others with no clear plans. Based on a literature review and document analysis methods, the results suggest that progress in curriculum transformation is mediated by context and history, as well as differences in institutional commitment to the decolonisation education project. The authors suggest that – with support from government and policymakers – a clear and detailed programme of curriculum transformation is needed, underpinned by a moral imperative to foreground African identity in the transition to the new African university.

Keywords: African identity, new African university, Fourth Industrial Revolution, curriculum transformation, decolonisation.

Introduction

African identity is in many ways at the centre of debates on transitioning to the new African university. It is invoked in the notions of indigenisation, Africanisation and decolonisation

linked to institutional cultural transformation (Maringe, 2017; Metz, 2017). The notion of African identity is not defined by race but by the ideologies and philosophies of African people's morals, culture, beliefs, practices and traditions. According to Mino, et al. (2022), the colonialisation of education in Africa separated educated Africans from indigenous knowledge and created a loss of identity. In this paper, while focusing on the notion of African identity in this broader institutional context, the authors are concerned with exploring African identity vis-a-vis the education decolonisation project, with specific reference to curriculum transformation at universities. In South Africa, curriculum reform is at the core of every educational transformation initiative in both the previously white universities and black universities. According to Lumadi (2021, p. 1-2), a decolonised curriculum should address the following key questions, "Who is teaching? Who is being taught? What is the learning content? How is it being taught? In the hard-core version of decolonisation, African knowledge must replace Western knowledge at the centre of the African curriculum". While the push for curriculum transformation in South Africa has been there since 1994, it was the student protests of 2015 and 2016 that precipitated and necessitated a renewed interest in the transformation of universities (Le Grange et al. 2020). Le Grange et al. (2020, p. 1) argue that, "The decolonisation of the curriculum is an important conversation, and long overdue, given that the Western model of academic organization on which the South African university is based, remains largely unchallenged". Decolonising the curriculum involves the process of interrogating a formerly colonial country's curriculum with a view to inclusivity; thereby recognising the diversity of people's identities, cultures and experiences. As contended by Sithole (2016), there is a need for diverse ecologies of knowledge and for promoting a pluriversalised idea of the world.

Similarly, Latin American scholars have argued for the recognition of indigenous and diverse knowledge as part of the broader universal knowledge base (see for example, Grosfoguel, 2007). However, as part of a global economy, the envisaged African identity-driven university cannot be immune from global developments impacting the social and economic lives of citizens. Though not immune from global developments, African identity-driven universities should embrace characteristics and beliefs that distinguish them from others that are not African. Ebewo and Sirayi argue that:

> During the apartheid rule in South Africa, established universities and other tertiary institutions were forcibly segregated to serve particular racial groups. Some critics have stated that the apartheid regime in South Africa supported an exclusively Western

> model of education, and that university education was based on a mono-cultural approach with bias towards Western values and expectations (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018, p. 82).

Instead, as further argued by Ebewo and Sirayi (2018, p. 82), "The transformation of the education sector is supposed to boost the Africanisation (African-oriented content) of the syllabus, foregrounding the cultural practices and values of the African people". As such, curriculum transformation at South African universities, in recognising their African heritage, should take seriously the project of foregrounding of African traditions, beliefs, culture and practices in the same way that European (or any other) universities foreground European culture and traditions. This does not mean rejecting Western ideas and epistemologies that have relevance for curriculum change in the African context. If such sensitive and inclusive transformations are embraced, South African universities would be locally relevant, yet globally responsive.

With the above context in mind, this study explores curriculum transformation developments in four South African universities, two predominantly black (usually referred to as the historically disadvantaged) and two predominantly white (usually referred to as the historically advantaged) universities. The emphasis is on the period since 2015 when student protests refocused attention on education decolonisation. Of relevance here is that the historically disadvantaged black universities were financially and materially deprived, relative to their white counterparts, resulting from the separate development policy of apartheid in South Africa. Kadhila and Nyambe (2022) concur when arguing that African higher education has a history of limited resources, inadequate capacity and a history of neglect which makes it struggle to effectively transform and respond to increasing social and economic demands. In addition, they suggest there is a lack of capacity for effectively advancing the project of curriculum decolonisation in African higher education; yet this capacity is necessary to prepare current and future generations to transform society and the economy (Kadhila & Nyambe, 2022).

Drawing on developments at selected historically black and historically white universities, the authors suggest that much needs to be done to deepen understanding of the epistemological importance of African identity and the decolonising of the curriculum at African universities. There is also a need to understand the social and educational imperatives driving African curriculum design and pedagogical choices. In so doing, African philosophies – and how they inform approaches to an African identity-inspired university – need

foregrounding. The dilemmas of African curriculum design and how institutions position themselves within the dilemmas beg interrogation, together with the integration of different components of the African curriculum in practice, without neglecting contextual peculiarities. As emphasised by Modiba (2017, p. 6), in discussing decolonising curriculum in higher education, "Successful decolonisation is context sensitive but is not context-driven".

African identity: a literature review

According to Kanu, "The knowledge of the identity of a thing helps you to know what the thing in question is and what may be legitimately attributed to it. The quest for an African identity in African has the same undergirding principles" (Kanu, 2013, p. 34). Thus, African identity highlights the distinguishing characteristics of Africans and Africa as a continent. Kanu (2013) further argues that historically three factors gave rise to the emergence of the quest for African identity, ideological race classification, the slave trade and the dehumanisation of Africa, as well as colonialism and the exploitation of Africa. Ndubuisi (2013, p. 222) suggests that, "The discovery of African identity is pertinent for a holistic emancipation of Africa. It is for the African thinkers…to find self-knowledge from within and not outside their culture". Africans need to rediscover and situate themselves on the right track away from Western-labelled identity, which regards pre-colonial Africa as static or dead. It is against this background that Africans need to rise above racial and colonial slavery, and situate and place themselves in their rightful world to realise meaningful developments. As Ndubuisi (2013) further asserts, there is no need to create a new African, but rather to know, understand, clarify, articulate and synthesise the African experience. This vision was captured by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, in articulating his African Renaissance vision, prompted by his shock at the 'slave mentality' of black South Africans when he returned from exile in 1990. Mbeki drew on his Renaissance vision to impress upon fellow South Africans to embrace both a new South African identity as well as a new African identity as elaborated in his famous 1996 'I am an African' speech:

> I am an African. I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land…I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home in our native land. Whatever their actions they remain part of me. In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves who came from the East…I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led, the

> patriots that Cetshwayo and Mphephu took to battle, the soldiers Moshoeshoe and Ngungunyane taught never to dishonour the cause of freedom" (Mbeki, 1996).

As noted by Adebajo (2020), beyond advancing an African identity, Mbeki's African Renaissance vision also recognised the importance of reintegrating Africa into the global economy. For Metz, African identity means:

> …self-understanding on the part of those reared in sub-Saharan cultures and environments…obtaining a firm grasp of one's society, which has shaped, and will continue to shape, the individual. One must therefore become familiar with the values, norms, cultures and institutions of the community in which one lives (Metz, 2017, p. 35).

The original authentic African identity from the horse's mouth (Africans themselves) is encapsulated in the notion of 'being-with' as opposed to the Western individualism, communalism as oppose[d] to collectivism. African 'self' is rooted in the family-hood" (Ndubuisi, 2013), thus emphasising the collective 'we' as opposed to the individualistic 'I'. The notion of 'being-with' emphasizes doing things together as a collective, increasing wellbeing by connecting and co-existing with others in a shared space. It stresses being in tune with the feelings and needs of others, being there for other people, lending a helping hand without financial expectations. As such, the notion of 'being-with' stands in contrast to 'Western individualism', which privileges individual ability, ambition and competition.

African identity is people-oriented, relevant to African people's needs and aspirations, and is a function of culture, group and collective identity. According to Ndubuisi (2013, p. 224), colour is another element for identification and 'black' is one of the fundamental elements of African identity. As further argued, "There is a particular continent where we have a large concentration of black people, and that continent is called Africa. Therefore, any man that has a black colour is called an African" (ibid). Colour is appreciated as a positive attribute of one's identity. Of course, in today's non-racial and integrated world, "colour" as a concept is quite fluid as many light-skinned persons are regarded as black. Africans have also identified themselves as being able to welcome other people into their communities. African identity in Ndubuisi' (2013, p. 224) words, centres on African self-hood, being-with-others (We-existence), African brotherhood, African extended family system and integrated network. Africans live in communalism/being-with and this is an integral part of explaining African

identity. It is defined in terms of 'We'. This is consistent with Waghid's (2017) articulation of the African philosophy of ubuntu as a form of human engagement, drawing on both individual and collective decision-making. To find himself or herself, in the words of Ndubuisi:

> The African now wishes to concretize his social, political, religious, economic and cultural ideas as an independent free and mature human being. He or she wishes to be the master of his/her world with its burden and joy to count and to be counted in the family of nations. Africans wish to move away from dependence on the West, technological inertia and determine their destiny in the scheme of things in the comity of nations (Ndubuisi, 2013, p. 225).

Africans want to reclaim their original value systems and worldviews which were distorted and destroyed by the assimilated Western civilisation which impinged negatively on African society. As noted by Ezeani:

> It is a pathological distortion of the mind: a mental state in which a person unconsciously despises what is his or hers and who he is or she is, and thus instead, an inordinate love or irrepressible desire to be the other person-the colonized (Ezeani, 2005, p. 45).

The search for African identity thus aims to reclaim the traditional identities disrupted and destroyed by colonialism. According to Ndubuisi (2013, p. 225), colonialism distorted the psyche of the African man and deranged his mental state, ultimately impoverishing Africans and worsening their conditions.

It is about freedom from states of intellectual solitude, and it is also about knowing oneself, knowing the environment in which one lives, regaining existential integrity, self-actualisation, self-discovery, economic consolidation, social progress and using their culture to become conscious of oneself (ibid). Ndubuisi (2013, p. 226) is further convinced that African identity is found in the African traditional worldview. To him, African identity is also about physical and African spiritual realities rooted in the family and community. An African finds meaning in the company of others, acknowledging the idea and reality of the other. Ubuntu constitutes the fulcrum of interpersonal relationships, making the "I" coincide with the "We". Reference is always made to one's family and community. An African's good and bad things, fortunes and misfortunes are shared by and become that of the society, finally ushering in corporate responsibility, and making African reality homogeneous.

Elaborating on language, coloniality and resistance Abdirachid and Knaus (2022) argue that to redress the systemic silencing of linguistic and ethnic identity, institutions' visions have to be transformed, wherein the purpose centres unity across racial, ethnic, and linguistic realities through sustaining multilingual populations. African identity involves foregrounding African languages. As Mazrui (1998) contends, Africa's linguistic dependence or Eurocentrism excludes ordinary people from the affairs of state and public life, making the pursuit of development and democracy so much more difficult to realise. As will be discussed, the question of language is central to curriculum transformation at African universities. Additionally, Zeleza (2006, p. 14) argues that: "Africa is as much a reality as it is a construct whose boundaries – geographical, historical, cultural, and representational – have shifted according to the prevailing conceptions and configurations of global racial identities and power". Echoing these sentiments, Wright (2001, p. 1) points out that discussing African identity is both a daunting and frustrating task because "Africa has long been relegated to the margins of global considerations of culture, economics and geopolitics and secondly because African identity is a category that is already over-determined and spectacularly over-generalised and homogenized".

African identity in relation to curriculum transformation in universities

According to Nyoni (2019, p. 2), "African education curricula remain largely Eurocentric and continue to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege and at the same time are laced with stereotypes, prejudices and patronising views about Africa and its people." Similarly, citing Mamdani (2016), Fomunyam argues that, the modern African university as we know it was built on a European model intended to colonise the minds of students and perpetrate a Eurocentric vision of society" (Fomunyam, 2019, p. 1). Arguing for the centring of African knowledges to decolonise higher education, Gumbo, Gasa and Knaus (2022) assert that while the bulk of universities across the African continent enrol and teach black students, the mechanisms of teaching, research and service remain tied to Western models with the scope, sequence and infrastructure of knowledge related to African universities remaining supremacist-informed, Western-centric and anti-black. African identity is about restoring African values. Higgs (2016) argues that the curriculum is a critical element in the transformation of higher education, and as a result, the inclusion of an African epistemic in higher education is imperative. Nyoni (2019, p. 2) argues that, "University generation of post-colonial knowledge and epistemologies need to be agile and accommodate waves or demands of curriculum transformation and change to accommodate Afrocentric developmental

projects." As such, the curriculum in African universities ought to be Africanised in line with African values entrenched in African culture. A foreign curriculum cannot serve African values, culture and all African embodiments well. Institutional cultures and practices in African tertiary institutions need to be Africanised including transforming the curriculum to pursue the agenda of African philosophy. Echoing these sentiments, Botha argues that:

> As curriculum is the vehicle that transports education, the filter through which life is strained, the lens through which adulthood is viewed and the door through which self-identity is entered, a revised view of life, adulthood and self-identity should be accompanied by a revised, relevant curriculum (Botha, 2007, p. 208).

According to Fomunyam:

> A decolonised curriculum would be predicated on the values of social justice, equality and critical pedagogy, so as to breed new agents of change in the society. Decolonising the curriculum, therefore, stands to make higher education institutions the indisputable microcosm of society in which they are located (Fomunyam, 2019, p. 1).

The curriculum that fosters African identity in an African context should acknowledge and incorporate indigenous African knowledge, award it its rightful place, and employ it as a tool in African higher education teaching. The curriculum must communicate the African experience to show commitment to Africa and African solutions. Transforming the curriculum would mean changing the organisation of teaching and learning in African universities from the colonial and Western ideas and injustices underpinning it. That would mean "decolonization of Africa, thereby confirming the connectedness of African universities to Africa and promoting a unique African philosophy and culture at these institutions" (Botha, 2007, p. 207). This does not mean entirely discarding Western experiences which have proved to be beneficial to African universities. Instead, "decolonised" European experiences can be adopted and co-exist with African experiences, cultures and philosophy to make an African university. It is clear that the curriculum is made to match its own context, in this case, the African context as "people are not separate from the earth and other living things" (Botha, 2007, p. 214).

As Nyoni (2019) asserts, Africa must completely rethink, deconstruct, reframe, and reconstruct the Eurocentric and colonial curricula as well as teaching methods at universities. The curriculum needs to be emancipatory in nature and fulfil the emancipatory mission towards Africans in the new African university and incorporate self-knowledge from within their

cultures, away from the labelled identity. It has to revoke considerations of Africans as inferior, backward, static and non-developmental. It is also imperative that the curriculum situate and place Africans in their rightful world, clarifying, articulating and synthesising the African experience. Among others, the curriculum must harbour the original, authentic African teachings and values of communalism, togetherness, family-hood, African people's needs, unity and group consciousness. Such values should be encompassed in African culture, emphasising (as multicultural) the feasibility amid the negative African labels as "not one but many peoples and races with a diversity of cultural beliefs, languages and traditions" (Ndubuisi, 2013, p. 224). The curriculum should acknowledge negatives and use them positively for African holistic development, not allowing such views to derail the mission of the envisaged African university with an African curriculum.

It can be argued that student learning and learning outcomes require deconstruction considering the lines of Africa's complex colonial history. The curriculum needs to cherish and appreciate Africans' black colour as the fundamental element of African identity and the qualities and traits of Africans as welcoming to other races, drawing on the African communal experience. At a basic level, the colour "black" must not be taught in the Eurocentric sense of representing "darkness" and "evil", it should be taught as something "bright" and "good", with the power to be warm and embracing. It has to embrace and move with African technological innovations dictated by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) to avoid technological inertia, restoring Africans' original value systems and traditional identities in their plurality. Emphasising the above values, the curriculum would help Africans to regain existential integrity, self-actualisation, self-discovery, economic consolidation and social progress (Ndubuisi, 2013, p. 225). It must harbour the aspirations of African physical and spiritual realities rooted in the family and community, emphasising ubuntu as one of the cornerstones of African life. This involves prioritising African languages, with Africa's linguistic independence promoted through an African curriculum.

In South Africa, the nationwide student protests of 2015 and 2016 induced more intense conversations on the decolonisation of universities, including but not limited to, curriculum transformation as one major component of redress in South African higher education. For example, Malabela (2020) writing about the experiences at Wits University and Ndelu (2020) on those at the University of Cape Town, both identified students' call for a decolonised/more Afrocentric curriculum and the transformation of institutional cultures as key student demands, among others, such as free and equal education. Most universities have responded differently

to the call for curriculum transformation in line with the individual contexts in which they find themselves. The institutional cases differ in form and content. The majority of institutions in South Africa have since been engaging in extensive public lectures, summits, conferences, workshops and seminars to address the curriculum transformation challenge. This has seen a resurgence in research and publications, on the theme of Africanising the curriculum at South African universities (Tella & Motala, 2020). In most cases, the grappling of the universities with the demands of curriculum transformation and its decolonisation amounts to mere rhetoric and superficial engagement, lacking clear direction. It is against this background that Le Grange et al. (2020) question whether the unique institutional responses to curriculum transformation are geared towards real decolonisation of the university curriculum or is it just 'decolonial-washing'. As further argued, some institutions resort to instrumentalist and quick-fix solutions to transform curricula, and that results in decolonial-washing and political symbolism rather than substantive change (Le Grange et al. 2020). Resulting from student protests, the Department of Higher Education and Training for South African universities pronounced at a summit held on October 2015 the need to Africanise and decolonise the curriculum. Some universities responded by appointing committees with coordinators to lead and steer processes to explore ways in which the university curriculum could be transformed.

According to Nyoni (2019, p. 6–8), the decolonising of African curricula needs to decage the mind to realise a reimagined, humanised andragogy and pedagogy within the understanding of Africa as well as inclusion and cultural diversity. Presently, as Knaus et al. (2022, p. 1) argue, institutions of higher education in many cases reflect the scope, sequence, structure and ideology of Western academia at the expense of indigenous African systems. This paper focuses on how, initiated by the 2015 and 2016 student protests across the country, two predominantly white universities (historically advantaged institutions) and two predominantly black universities (historically disadvantaged institutions) with different cultures and backgrounds and located in different provinces in South Africa have responded to the call to Africanise and decolonise the curriculum. Amidst the curriculum conversations, the question is: Are universities practically transforming their curricula? Or are they engaging in decolonial-washing whereby they provide false or misleading information about the environmental soundness of their curriculum transformation emanating from the instrumentalist and quick-fix process? This paper explores whether curriculum transformation at various South African universities conforms to the African identity imperatives in the context of transitioning to the new African university. As such the case studies explore curriculum transformation against

African epistemic constructions, philosophy, conditions, innovations, indigenous knowledge systems, experiences, solutions, historical developments and values entrenched in African culture. In so doing, the paper explores whether curriculum transformation in South Africa is fulfilling the emancipatory mission towards authentic African teachings, values and qualities– which include communalism, togetherness, family-hood, unity, group consciousness and being welcoming. Such authenticity is also founded on African cultural beliefs, languages, and traditions, as well as physical and spiritual realities.

South African higher education policy context

Relating curriculum transformation to the decolonisation of African higher education from across the continent, including the South African higher education policy context, Maluleke (2022) argues that the curriculum can be decolonised by changing policy guidelines, rewriting the curriculum, centring indigenous elders and community leaders as well as encouraging writers and scholars to produce culturally relevant literature. This concurs with the assertion of Chipindi et al. (2022) that, to advance the decolonisation of higher education in the Global South and North, it is important to localise knowledge systems and integrate them into the academic pursuit of faculty members, and enhance epistemological plurality within the academy at the researcher, institutional and community level. The policy imperative for the transformation of South African universities may be traced to the mid-1990s. "The higher education system must be transformed to redress past inequities, to serve the new order, to meet pressing national needs and respond to new realities and opportunities" (Government Gazette, 1997). Post-2000, the transformation of universities has been premised on the above obligation with policymakers reiterating calls for the transformation of universities in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, its location in Africa and in the world at large (Department of Education, 2008). More specifically, South African universities were seen to have a duty to Africanise the curriculum to suit African identity imperatives as per the Higher Education Summit of October 2015. As such, it has become imperative from an official government level for the universities to redress past inequities and adopt transformation plans in line with African identity and decolonial imperatives.

Methodology

According to Mohajan (2018), a qualitative research approach can be used to explore several areas of human behaviour for the development of organisations. The approach enables a deeper understanding of experiences, phenomena and context (Bryman, et al. 1996). In this study, a

qualitative research approach was used in the gathering of data, which included a literature review and documentary analysis. The review of the literature constituted an important part of the methodology to explore and understand African identity and curriculum transformation in the four sampled South African universities. Document analysis as a qualitative research method was used, involving the analysis of content from written documents to identify key themes.

According to Bowen (2009, p. 31), document analysis as part of qualitative research methods has advantages in terms of efficiency, availability, cost-effectiveness, lack of obtrusiveness and reactivity, stability, exactness and coverage. The approach is less time-consuming as it requires data selection (rather than data collection); meanwhile, many documents are already in the public domain, gathered and available because of internet connectivity (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). The approach makes documentary analysis cost-effective, stable, non-reactive and suitable for repeated reviews providing broad coverage of many events over a long time as Bowen (2009, p. 31) further argues. Data were examined and interpreted to elicit meaning and gain an understanding of African identity and curriculum transformation in South African universities. Those such as the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and University of Limpopo (UL) gave a rich experience. Two universities falling under the historically and predominantly white universities, UJ and Nelson Mandela University (NMU) and two from the category of the historically black universities, University of Fort Hare (UFH) and UL, were sampled. Selection of UJ was on the basis that it is a comprehensive university offering a combination of programmes after the merger process whereby the Rand Afrikaanse Universiteit (previously a predominantly white Afrikaner university) merged with Technikon Witwatersrand (a former white technikon), and the Soweto and Doornfontein campuses of Vista university (a relatively small former black institution).

NMU, previously known as the University of Port Elizabeth, was also a white university. Fort Hare University is an old university in the Transkei, catering predominantly for the black Xhosa ethnic group of the Ciskei and Transkei, both former rural homelands under apartheid and where many political leaders studied. These include statesmen in South Africa (e.g., Nelson Mandela and Mangosuthu Buthelezi) and the rest of Africa (e.g., former president Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe). The university has a history of struggle and student revolts against white minority rule. ULis a predominantly black university where almost all students are black and dominated by black staff members. Known as the University of the North under apartheid,

it has a history of student protests dating back to apartheid years. Many struggle heroes studied at UL (e.g., the current president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa).

The selection of two historically privileged white urban-based institutions, with strong financial resource bases and two historically under-resourced black institutions in rural South Africa, will yield a rich, fertile ground for comparing and understanding African identity and curriculum transformation in different contexts. Data were analysed using a comparative approach over the period from 1994 (at the dawn of the democratic dispensation) to the national student revolts of 2015 and 2016 to date. The availability of institutional policies driving curriculum transformation was sought. The following case studies offer a descriptive analysis of initiatives towards African identity-inspired curriculum transformation. Data were obtained from various sources including the Department of Higher Education websites regarding higher education agenda, policies and legislative frameworks, university websites, media and academic articles. Data were analysed to understand the contextual situation of the curriculum transformation initiatives and historical roots of the institutions.

African identity in relation to curriculum transformation in the historically advantaged universities

Nelson Mandela University

Despite student protests (ongoing since 2015 and 2016) at NMU, no clear guiding document has yet been adopted for the curriculum transformation of the institution (Le Grange et al. 2020). Only limited progress on the transformation itself post-1994 has been made. But as Le Grange et al. (2020) argue, this could be regarded simultaneously as a major weakness or an opportunity since it gives different stakeholders lower down at faculty level the leeway to be creative and innovative without having to follow a specific script. The university's vision and mission statements do not directly address the transformation and decolonisation of the university and curriculum. The other major challenge is that most staff members at the university do not support the call for decolonisation (Le Grange et al. 2020). As such, university transformation is slow as only a few staff members in the faculties support changes. Despite such challenges, teaching and learning at the university focus on interdisciplinary conversations about curriculum decolonisation and Africanisation – though not in a coordinated way (Le Grange et al. 2020). Nevertheless, amid the challenges, the university faculties are making efforts to decolonise the curriculum. This could be regarded as a first step in the university curriculum transformation. Decolonisation and Africanisation processes are

addressed on the institution's website with specific reference to teaching and learning. Emphasis is placed on the importance of curriculum conversations to guide the Africanisation and decolonisation of the curriculum. The Centre for Critical Studies in Higher Education at NMU is where conversations around curriculum transformation are held in the form of public lectures and seminars.

Another endeavour is that the university, in consultation with the community, names its student residences and university buildings after individuals who became heroes and heroines in the liberation struggle. Although only symbolic, it is a movement signifying recognition of the importance of decolonisation and university transformation. Individual faculties are making strides to transform and renew the curriculum, e.g., the Faculty of Education. Terminology such as "transformation" and "curriculum renewal" is prominent on the university website. Efforts have been made to include African writers in the reading lists of the university's language department (such as Chinua Achebe, Sol Plaatjie and Athol Fugard). However, as argued by Le Grange et al. (2020), this has not decentred Western knowledge. Although these are important small steps, curriculum practices at NMU reflect a largely Eurocentric view of the world. As Garuba (2015, p. 8) argues, the practice amounts to "decorating the master's living room by adding raffia chairs" and argues instead for a rethinking of the theories that frame the curriculum.

Students display dissatisfaction regarding curriculum transformation and decolonisation by engaging in protests. This tends to make the relationship between the university management and students tense. The university management is very often accused of being reluctant to transform and of not negotiating in good faith on internal issues of decolonising the curriculum. There is always an element of mistrust between students and the university management. Students usually accuse the university management of hijacking the university decolonisation process and see nothing transformational and decolonising to the curriculum (Le Grange et al. 2020).

What is apparent is that transformation and decolonisation of universities and the curriculum cannot be accomplished in days, months or a year. Common ground should be forged by all university stakeholders to provide a shared understanding of what constitutes curriculum transformation and decolonisation in line with African identity imperatives. However, although the curriculum is largely Eurocentric, strides have been made by both students and some academics in certain faculties (e.g., in the humanities and social sciences where discussions in seminars, workshops and conferences regarding curriculum change have

started). Overall, the university has just started its efforts at placing African identity at the centre of its curriculum transformation project.

University of Johannesburg

Similar to NMU, UJ had its own way of approaching university curriculum transformation and decolonisation. According to the 2016 guidelines for curriculum transformation, in line with UJ's Strategic Plan 2025, the university has adopted global excellence with a Pan-African focus in teaching and learning as its strategic objective (UJ, 2016). The university has aimed to have "Intellectually rigorous curricula which respond innovatively to the challenges of the 21st century" grounded in the wider positioning of the university as "The Pan-African Centre for Critical Intellectual Inquiry, with the primary goal of achieving global excellence and stature" (UJ, 2016).

UJ has also complied with the resolutions of the Higher Education Summit of 2015, which stated that universities have a responsibility to review university curricula and forms of knowledge production that are not sufficiently situated within African and the Global South contexts, and are dominated by Western worldviews (Higher Education Summit, 2015). The above led to the UJ Senate agreeing in 2016 that "decolonization should be conceptualised in terms of teaching and learning and research" and that while there is much contestation around the term decolonisation, discussions and engagements must be held within the broader academic community of the university (UJ, 2016).

As argued by the Senate (UJ, 2016, p. 2), the purpose of the guidelines was "to provide academics with an initial set of 'tools' required to review curricular as well as teaching and learning practices, in line with the call to decolonize our curriculum". The further realisation was made and acknowledged that "decolonization demands interrogation of the underlying assumptions, values, principles, absolute truths, epistemologies and pedagogies across the disciplines" (UJ, 2016, p. 2). The following standards to guide the review of the curriculum were established (UJ, 2016, p. 2):

- Academic leadership: Faculties and academics must own the project of decolonizing the curriculum.
- Transparency: Being open to interrogation of the curriculum and how it is constructed.
- Access: Recognizing the need for epistemological access for students.
- Context: Movement away from monolithic perspectives and locating curriculum, teaching and learning in the context of Africa.

- Critical review: Using peer and other forms of review and student inputs to facilitate curriculum changes.
- Curriculum reform: Initiate and reflect on the existing curricula with a view to locating and acknowledging knowledge from marginalized knowledge systems.
- Process: Recognizing that decolonizing the curriculum is not a destination but an ongoing process.

The above guidelines, as put forward by the university (UJ, 2016, p. 3), would serve as possible transformative triggers for academics who are reviewing modules, courses and qualifications. The university has recognised the importance of reviewing the curriculum by questioning the assumptions underpinning the Eurocentric knowledge systems. The academics were given an option of either adopting a content-driven approach in their specific disciplines, expanding on the curriculum already in place or adopting a different approach interrogating the assumptions, values, principles, absolute truths, epistemologies and pedagogies of all disciplines (UJ, 2016, p. 3). Emphasis is put on questioning as a central issue in curriculum decolonisation and transformation.

The university made strides by initiating decolonisation and transformation of the curriculum whereby the disciplines are reviewed to "examine the extent to which the traditional boundaries of the discipline can be expanded beyond the existing parameters to incorporate the context and knowledge of Africa and more broadly, the South" (UJ, 2016, p. 3). The university further took it upon itself to review textbooks, reading resources and other learning materials for a greater diversity of content, also reviewing pedagogical approaches in the teaching and learning environment (UJ, 2016, p. 3). Additionally, the university undertook to review assessment criteria, tasks, knowledge production, research agenda, assumptions of knowledge, and the theoretical content of the courses offered, further interrogating whether the content of the courses speaks to a diverse student population in a developing democracy in Africa (UJ, 2016, p. 3–4). However, the progress of the above initiatives has been slow, with some faculties being slower than others (UJ, 2016).

Questions have abounded as to whether the curriculum offered at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels is fit for purpose and the context in which we live (UJ, 2016, p. 3). Is the curriculum equipping students with relevant, real-world problem-solving skills, considering the diversified nature of the university's student population, their experiences, teaching and learning, and assessment criteria? Critical questions have also been

asked concerning how disciplines are conceptualised and taught. The university has also taken it upon itself to consider key discipline-specific debates on post-colonial theory, engage with alumni and current students, and seek their views on specific courses and content. The university further fosters actions to be taken within faculties where discussions have to be held on the broader issues emerging from the curriculum decolonisation and transformation debates. The deans of faculties are entrusted with the task of providing the academic deputy vice-chancellor with progress reports on initiatives undertaken within their faculties. They also have to provide a plan of action that includes milestones and timeframes for implementation and provide feedback on the reports, to the established curriculum task team (UJ, 2016, p. 4).

Emanating from the above broad guidelines for curriculum transformation, UJ has established research bodies in different faculties entrusted with multidisciplinary research related to decolonisation and transformation of the curricula. Pan-African studies take the lead in various faculties with peer-reviewed articles and books published on decolonisation and transformation of the curricula. The Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education Studies (AMCHES) in the Faculty of Education is one such body, where decolonisation and social justice debates, public lectures, seminars, conferences, summits and webinars are held. A vast body of literature has thus been produced with several papers and books published in AMCHES to that effect. Similar to other universities, UJ has named university buildings, student residences and research bodies (e.g., AMCHES) and sections after the renowned African writers or Africans who took leading roles in the African search for identity. Collectively, these initiatives display commitment and dedication to an African university with an African identity, thereby countering accusations of narrow political symbolism (Jansen, 2002; Le Grange et al. 2020). Appointment of black personnel in strategic positions of management, research and lecturing positions is a further step towards the realisation of the curriculum intentions of the university. To show further commitment to the curriculum Africanisation course, the university introduced the “African Insights” module at the undergraduate level of study. The university is making progress to include African epistemic, values, philosophy, conditions, innovations, indigenous African knowledge, experiences, solutions, teachings, beliefs, languages and traditions as African identity imperatives. But much still needs to be done to be representative of the African university in Africa, through curriculum transformation. Well-acknowledged in its guidelines is the fact that curriculum transformation is a process, it cannot be implemented overnight.

African identity in relation to curriculum transformation in the historically disadvantaged universities

University of Fort Hare

As argued by the South African Human Rights Commission Report (2010, p. 2), "issues of transformation are not only the concern of previously white universities but equally concern previously black universities...though on a different scale depending on historical backgrounds and context". UFH is not immune to transformation challenges. The report stresses (2020, p. 86) that "universities must relook and reinvent their transformation programmes to ones that are goal-driven and that mobilizes active participation by staff and students".

Significantly, there is no curriculum transformation plan at UFH. As one of the historically disadvantaged institutions, the university is still pre-occupied with quality imperatives, as set out in the Institutional Improvement Plan recommendations by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) to ensure that the overall quality of the educational experience offered to students and staff in the Alice campus is not compromised by plans for the growth of the East London campus (HEQC, 2009, p. 1). In terms of transformation and institutional culture, the university is urged to develop a comprehensive human resources strategy which takes into account equity targets and issues of xenophobia amongst staff and students (HEQC, 2009, p. 5–6). The policies that affect the quality of teaching and learning have to be finalized, consolidated, implemented and monitored. To improve the quality of student experience at the university, the university has to create mechanisms to give effect to the goals of teaching and learning in the development of the curriculum. To succeed in that, the university has to undertake a review of its committees dealing with curriculum transformation.

Vice-Chancellor Dr Mvuyo Tom asserts that, as recommended in the Soudien Report (DoE, 2008 p. 13), the university needs to "revisit transformation issues...and to move from its cruder and simplistic manifestations to a far deeper understanding which straddle[s] pedagogy and curriculum, institutional cultures, democratization of higher education and its role in development". As acknowledged, the university still has a long way to go. Makura et al. (2020, p. 3) argue that, "Research on best practices in higher education aimed at empowering the disadvantaged learner is scanty". Emphasis is put on student access to education by the previously disadvantaged groups and the academic development programmes to bridge the gap between secondary and higher education. Overwhelmed by a deluge of under-prepared

students, little regarding curriculum transformation to suit African identity imperatives is talked about. Academic interventions focus on coping mechanisms aimed at increasing student throughput and retention rates as part of transformation. The university mostly nurtures what is already available with limited transformation to the new reality of changing to an African university with African identity features. As a rural university catering mainly to black students, the historically disadvantaged institutions have a feeling that they are already Africanised. They forget that a huge task of Africanising, decolonising and transforming the curriculum awaits them besides being historically black universities. The naming of university buildings after political heroes and heroines is construed to mean a decolonised university, though Eurocentric curricula and other practices still prevail. Most of the historically disadvantaged South African universities, UFH included, are characterised by educational under-preparedness. The key issue is to continually review the curriculum and interrogate its relevance in an African context. This needs a common understanding of what it means to transform the curriculum to portray African identity aspirations. Transforming the curriculum asks every university stakeholder to take a critical stance to interweave multiple perspectives and interrogate every voice and knowledge that comes into the transformation process. That should be incorporated into the vision and mission statements of the university as well.

Robert Sobukwe, the former president of the Fort Hare student representative council and who is regarded as a doyen of Pan-Africanism (1949), called for UFH to be "the barometer of African thought" (Mbabela, 2018, p. 1). The call was given renewed energy by the 2015 and 2016 #FeesMustFall demonstrations. Changing all the management personnel, lecturing staff and research personnel to black without changing curriculum content, the curriculum will remain colonial and Eurocentric. Fort Hare as an African university should not produce students who are culturally alienated (Mbabela, 2018). It should be truly Afrocentric in every approach, though not entirely discarding important, helpful and necessary European developments. As Sobukwe asserts, "institutions of higher learning in South Africa and in Africa should be an embodiment of African thought and aspirations of the people and contribute to a new order" (cited in Mbabela, 2018, p. 3).

University of Limpopo

At UL, strides have been made in diversifying the academy by empowering black and female academics, upgrading employee qualifications, institutional naming of buildings and promoting a diverse student life in student residences with almost 99% of student occupants in the residences being black (South African Association of Political Sciences [SAAPS], 2017).

There are also extensive ongoing discussions and critical reflections on curriculum decolonisation taking place, with most of them looking at, amongst others, radical economic transformation at the university, theorising transformation and the journey from decolonisation to the Africanisation of the university (SAAPS, 2017). Diversifying institutional culture to satisfy the majority, forces the university to remain a divided community because the minority feels side-lined and silenced. This results in diversity not being fully appreciated, by the minority staff members in particular (SAAPS, 2017).

As one of the historically disadvantaged universities, evaluation of the impact of transformation at UL rests on various issues, such as whether the university's vision and mission statements are aligned with its African academic obligations as an African university. Is the university well-resourced to deal with transformation issues? Is the university culture and management well-placed to effect transformation as per the required legislation? Analysing the situation regarding the above, during its official inauguration, UL Transitional Student Representative Council (SRC) which was enacted in 2020/2021 painted a bleak picture when asserting that: "Ga gona transformation mo moes" (A Pedi sentence meaning that, there is no transformation taking place here at the university) (mobile.twitter.com>ulvarsity>status, 2020). This is several years post-1994 democratic dispensation and after the 2015 and 2016 student protests.

Other restructuring and previous merger processes with the Medical University of South Africa, including cash-flow challenges as well as enrolment plans, constituted the university's major focus at the expense of curriculum decolonisation to display African identity. The university leadership has to take the lead and be prepared to positively influence the university community in complying with the legislation enacted and promote transformation with clear terms of reference. Change should go with accountability and responsibility. Curriculum transformation should be governed by a set of rules and activities which should be coordinated professionally by the university leadership in line with its values of accountability, transparency, integrity, academic freedom, excellence and professionalism. But above all, it should be governed by African identity imperatives inclusive of Western good practices.

The university's motto is, 'finding solutions for Africa'. It is a good motto in terms of the university's transformation intentions. Yet, it needs to be accordingly implemented to reach the goals intended. To be a truly leading African university embodying African values and aspirations, the university therefore should live up to its motto, 'finding solutions for Africa'.

Though catering for a majority of African students, with almost all university student residences, university halls and other university buildings named after previous student leaders of influence, influential politicians and African heroes and heroines, the university lags behind in terms of decolonising and transforming the curricula to be representative of an African university and its embedded values as entrenched in African identity. The faculty reports do not indicate a clear action plan and time frames to practically effect curriculum decolonisation and transformation. As such, UL has a long road to travel in curriculum decolonisation and transformation efforts, drawing on the experiences of institutions that have made greater progress, such as UJ.

In reflecting on the trajectories of the fours institutions, emerging from a privileged white background, NMU has only just started its efforts at placing African identity at the centre of its curriculum transformation project. UJ is making progress to include African epistemic, values, philosophy, conditions, innovations, indigenous African knowledge, experiences, solutions, teachings, beliefs, languages and traditions as African identity imperatives. Nevertheless, much still needs to be done in terms of curriculum transformation to achieve the African university in Africa. Well-acknowledged in its guidelines is the fact that curriculum transformation is a process, it cannot be implemented overnight. The black universities, UL and UFH, mostly nurture what is already available with limited transformation towards a new African university reality and identity. As rural poverty-stricken universities with limited resources catering mainly for black students, historically black institutions tend to have a feeling that they are inherently Africanised.

Conclusion

Understanding of curriculum decolonisation and transformation differs across the four institutions, with more progress being made at historically white institutions than at black institutions. There is uneven transformation depending on institutional context, institutional will, exposure and historical background. Curriculum transformation gradually loses its vigour and revolutionary impulse because of the higher education landscape that continues to reflect the legacies of segregated development. In all the universities, curriculum planning needs to change to curriculum implementation, with careful monitoring and evaluation of progress. For example, the much-needed grassroots curriculum conversations could take place under the auspices of faculty coordinators reporting to well-constituted and representative university task teams. There must be a strong moral imperative to foreground African identity as the driving force in the transition to the new African university. Overall, an unambiguous, detailed

programme of curriculum transformation is needed. Moreover, besides university leaders and managers playing their part, government and policymakers need to play a more supportive role in addressing sectoral resistance and in responding to student realities and demands. These steps can also help to confront the decolonisation of the mind challenge posed by Steve Biko, Thabo Mbeki and others as part of the broader education decolonisation project.

It is recommended that more studies be done to critically examine the changing concepts of African identity and curriculum transformation, conducive to 21st-century Africa with its diversity of multiracial and religious backgrounds. This would have to go beyond government proclamations to in-depth case studies of individual or comparative studies of curriculum transformation at universities in South Africa/Africa.

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