

Curriculum Transformation: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on 'Decolonisation' and 'Africanisation' of the Curriculum in South Africa's Higher Education

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Abstract : The years of 2015-2017 witnessed a huge campaign, and in some instances, violent protests in South Africa by students and some groups of academics advocating the decolonisation of the curriculum of universities. These protests have forced through high expectations for universities to teach a curriculum relevant to the country, and the continent as well as enabled South Africa to participate in the globalised world. To realise this purpose, most universities are currently undertaking steps to transform and decolonise their curriculum. However, the transformation process is challenged and delayed by lack of a collective understanding of the concepts 'decolonisation' and 'africanisation' that should guide its application. Even more challenging is lack of a contextual understanding of these concepts across different university disciplines. Against this background, and underpinned in a qualitative research paradigm, the perspectives of these concepts as applied by different university disciplines were examined in order to understand and establish their implementation in the curriculum transformation agenda. Data were collected by reviewing the teaching and learning plans of 8 faculties of an institution of higher learning in South Africa and analysed through content and textual analysis. The findings revealed varied understanding and use of these concepts in the transformation of the curriculum across faculties. Decolonisation, according to the faculties of Law and Humanities, is perceived as the eradication of the Eurocentric positioning in curriculum content and the constitutive rules and norms that control thinking. This is not done by ignoring other knowledge traditions but does call for an affirmation and validation of African views of the world and systems of thought, mixing it with current knowledge. For the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, decolonisation is seen as making the content of the curriculum relevant to students, fulfilling the needs of industry and equipping students for job opportunities. This means the use of teaching strategies and methods that are inclusive of students from diverse cultures, and to structure the learning experience in ways that are not alien to the cultures of the students. For the Health Sciences, decolonisation of the curriculum refers to the need for a shift in Western thinking towards being more sensitive to all cultural beliefs and thoughts. Collectively, decolonisation of education thus entails that a nation must become independent with regard to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Based on the findings, for universities to successfully transform their curriculum and integrate the concepts of decolonisation and Africanisation, there is a need to contextually determine the meaning of the concepts generally and narrow them down to what they should mean to specific disciplines. Universities should refrain from considering an umbrella approach to these concepts. Decolonisation should be seen as a means and not an end. A decolonised curriculum should equally be developed based on the finest knowledge skills, values, beliefs and habits around the world and not limited to one country or continent.

Keywords : Africanisation, curriculum, transformation, decolonisation, multidisciplinary perspectives, South Africa's higher education

Conference Title : ICCIDPI 2018 : International Conference on Curriculum Innovation, Design, Planning and Implementation

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

Conference Dates : September 17-18, 2018