





Towards decolonisation of primary school education in South Africa



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Background: Despite the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, most black schools in the country still embrace coloniality through policies and practices. This leads to disempowerment, loss of identity, inequalities and inferiority in the learners, which are nurtured till their adulthood. It is therefore important to decolonise the inherited curriculum and recognise African identity, culture and system as valuable for Africans.

Aim: This article aims to explore coloniality within the primary school education system in South Africa and aims to motivate curriculum transformation that will divest coloniality in Africa.

Setting: This article centres around South African Primary schools.

Methods: This article employs a desktop approach and a systematic literature review. To collect the data, the study selected articles from different search engines such as EBSCO, Science Direct and Google Scholar. This enables the synthesis of previous works to provide knowledge on the topic. The decoloniality theory underpins the study.

Results: Primary school education in South Africa is influenced by coloniality; hence, there is a need for transformation.

Conclusion: The primary school curriculum in South Africa needs to be revised in a decolonised manner to suit a multi-racial or ethnic South Africa for the realisation of an equitable and just future for Africans.

Contribution: This article provides knowledge about coloniality within the context of primary schools in South Africa and further recommends curriculum transformation to a truly African manner. It thus aligns with the journal's theme and scope, which is the interrogation of coloniality in South African primary schools.

Keywords: coloniality; decolonise; primary school; education; South Africa.

Introduction

There are many ways in which colonialists transformed their imperial and exploitation agenda on Africa. One of the ways was to manipulatively devalue African culture, identity, religion, education and many other ways of life. They claimed that Africa's education is unscientific and barbaric, the indigenous culture primitive, the religion satanic and regarded African identity as uncivilised and primitive (Mosweunyane 2013). To this end, colonialists introduced European and Western culture as a way of liberating Africans into a global lifestyle and civilisation (Duncan 2022). Against this notion, it is argued that there was indigenous education in Africa before colonialism (Seroto 2011). Prior to colonisation, Africans had their own well-established systems and rich educational histories until the indigenous educational landscape underwent profound transformations because of the influence of missionaries and the forces of conquest and colonialism (Malisa & Missedja 2019). While there were no formal writings, curricula, syllabuses and/or textbooks, there were structural and systematic vocational training that graduated youths into vocations such as blacksmiths, hunters, farmers, agriculturists and builders (Onwauchi 1972). The indigenous school system prepared students to be economically independent, civil and self-sufficient and be responsible for their respective families and society. However, this process was truncated, and Africans were introduced to a foreign system of education (History.com Editors 2020).

Educational systems during the colonial era in various colonies were further characterised by racial and ethnic segregation (Malisa & Missedja 2019). There were several interceptions into the

Note: Special Collection: Interrogating Coloniality in South African Primary Schools.

African system of education through colonialism, which gave birth to a foreign education system that eroded the existing African education system, also known as the indigenous education system (Ezeanya-Esiobu 2019). The changes as argued by Lebesa (2015) introduced new norms, values and practices into African societies, eventually codifying them into statutes and replacing the indigenous systems.

South Africa like many African countries was colonised by European powers and later apartheid ensued in South Africa. According to South African History online, Stow (1905) and Thompson (2001), the first known inhabitants of South Africa, have been referred to as the Khoisan, the Khoekhoe and the San. They were then joined by people who migrated from other parts of Africa during what is known as the Bantu expansion southwards through Africa. This was followed by European settlers, starting with the Dutch.

Thompson (2001) further narrates how other European powers eventually settled alongside the Dutch and excluded the indigenous people such as the Khoisan, the Khoekhoe, San and other Bantu ethnic groups such as the amaZulus, amaXhosas and Basotho people. The exclusion of the indigenous people in the governance and socio-economic structure eventually led to a policy of apartheid (Santos 2016). Colonisation thus became intertwined with apartheid and both affected education in South Africa, including primary school education (Oliver & Oliver 2017). The entrenched educational inequalities in South Africa, spanning from the colonial and apartheid eras to post-apartheid policy, are still evident till present times (Christie 2020). Thobejane (2013) thus avers that a devastating effect of apartheid curriculum was the way in which not only class distinctions were encouraged, but at the bottom of this curriculum were gender inequalities, where women (especially black women) were regarded as a weaker species in all facets of the South African socio-economic life. Education in South Africa remains greatly influenced by the past, and this has led to ongoing debates over the years, as well as concerted efforts to decolonise the educational structure in South Africa (Moodley 2021).

Three major tools were used by the colonial masters to devalue education systems in South Africa and other African countries. These were relegating African languages as vernacular (Hirsch 2020), promoting the notion that African culture, beliefs, tradition and religions are barbaric (Glassman 2021) and claiming that educational contents are unscientific, uncivilised and unstandardised (Seroto 2011). Thus, the knowledge of colonised groups, non-Europeans and indigenous folks were suppressed, or, as the decolonial scholar, Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Nunes (2014) explain, their knowledge suffered a form of 'epistemicide', which signifies their evisceration from the knowledge canon (Fataar 2018). The knowledge of the (colonial) university or school paid little or no attention to indigenous knowledge and favoured the Western canon, founded on a separation of modern Western knowledge from its non-Western knowers (Fataar 2018).

The swop of the African system of education for the European system of education did not come with any negotiation or dialogue. Africans were simply deprived of their own African education system through excessive force and missionary activities. To further perpetuate the colonial education agenda on Africa and Africans, success, power, economic breakthrough and privilege were considered equivalent to the amount of knowledge one has obtained from Western Education school subjects (Behari-Leak et al. 2020). The trajectory of colonialism in most African countries was thus, not just the loss of self-governance, economic independence and resources but also the foisting of coloniality on Africa.

Eventually, South Africa and many other African countries gained their independence from the colonial powers. However, after having lost grip of the physical exploitation of Africa, the colonialist shifted their grip on the African social, cultural and education system (Nhemachena 2023). By implication, Africans lost their identity, culture, social and education system to Western culture and education, and there is still a common mentality wherein African languages, culture, identity, education and socialisation are expected to align with Western values, contrary to which Africans will be regarded as uncivilised (Egunlusi 2017). The colonialist agenda to indoctrinate Africans into Western culture and practices was successful by replacing and transforming African indigenous education into Western Education. Colonising the African education system was not just to condemn it as uncivilised but replacing it and introducing it to learners from their early childhood was a way of sustaining the coloniality agenda and, of course, controlling the mindset of Africans (Montle 2020). Moreover, as the aim of education is to pilot an individual towards becoming a better person and useful in his or her community, investing in education is a route to controlling society at large. As much as the Western Education system brought some benefits, it propagates foreign culture and mindset in an ordinary African child (Behari-Leak et al. 2020).

This article explores coloniality within the education system in Africa, with a focus on primary school education in South Africa. It motivates the need for primary school education to be divested of coloniality and undergo transformation. It further explores and outlines ways in which primary school education in South Africa can be truly decolonised to adequately incorporate indigenous knowledge and culture.

Decolonisation is 'the dismantling of colonial systems that were established during a period when a nation maintains dominion over dependent territories' (Massey-Jones 2019). In the context of education, decolonising education means the removal of colonial legacies, thoughts and structure and remodelling it in a way that reflects the worldview of a particular society (Massey-Jones 2019).

Research methods and design

This study is a conceptual article that is designed within a qualitative methodology. Through a purposive sampling,

different articles were reviewed. Information was retrieved around coloniality within the context of primary schools in South Africa and how the African system can be completely decolonised and free from coloniality and its mentalities. Among others, certain keywords were used such as coloniality, decoloniality, apartheid, educational system in South African primary school system and many more that can shed light on the discourse around this topic. These were also the keywords used to source information on search engines such as EBSCO, Science Direct and Google Scholar and Google. The main criteria for selecting relevant information from these search engines were purposively filtered within the following framework: (1) space first globally and narrowed down to South African context, (2) most relevant to the purpose of the study and (3) that appears as the 1st top results from these search engines. Google was filtered according to PDF and must be within 5 years to date. The information was critically reviewed to provide answers to the research question: How is the South African Primary School Curriculum designed to encourage the continuum of coloniality in the African context. The key objective of this article therefore is to advocate for curriculum transformation that will divest coloniality in Africa. An additional goal is to stimulate further research initiatives for the decolonisation of the school system and broader African mindsets. With this research methodology, the article is further underpinned by Anibal Quijano's Decoloniality Theory (Mendoza 2020) to give context to the study, which is based on undoing colonial legacies. It must be noted that no human beings or animals were used as primary research subjects for this study as the study was purely desktop based. Thus, ethical considerations were not applicable. The section 'The Alienness of African education system' highlights colonialism's influence on African educational systems.

The Alienness of African education system

Africa is a continent blessed with the richness of culture, identity and history. However, rather than its education system embracing Africanism, Africans are introduced to a Eurocentric model of education, which is alien to Africa. Education, institutions and school systems were designed by foreign colonialists and Africans were and are still introduced to this education as early as at the primary school level (Seroto 2011). Education, being the most powerful weapon to change the world, the colonialists maintained it as a means of control (Du Plessis 2021). With regard to South Africa, Badat (2010) and the Soudien Report (2010) state that Eurocentric epistemologies are still firmly entrenched in South African education institutions, and there have been calls for intellectual spaces to be decolonised, deracialised, demasculinised and de-gendered (Badat 2021). The South African education system according to Du Plessis (2021) continues to navigate a colonial past within the context of global shifts and social changes, and many elements of South African education have remained untouched or unchanged. This is seen in the way the curriculum is structured in schools, access to quality education and the fact

that many South African schools are still structured according to a class system (Du Plessis 2021). Educational curriculums thus remain largely westernised, and more of the white European views are included in the curriculum (Le Grange 2016). Thus, the school system in South Africa is still moored by colonial legacies.

Coloniality-infused education in turn produces African indigenes who are disengaged from their culture and disoriented from the injustices, marginalisation and inequality of colonialism as they are trained to embrace Western and Eurocentric education and agenda. The pedagogical order positions children to sit while learning from a teacher who stands in the front, rather than the African style where children learn through socialisation and acculturation (McGrath et al. 2020). This is to prepare the African child's mindset to be a second-class citizen, listener, submissive, subjective and serve the supremacy of a certain class, culture, and colour. The confinement within a classroom is to further box their thinking ability to be framed within the content syllabus of the Western system (Olaoye 2014; Onwauchi 1972).

To further contextualise this argument, there are three main school subjects that are in Grade 1, for example, Language, Mathematics and Life Skills. As much as there are many related content areas for this level, they are not Afro-centric. For instance, children are meant to recite 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star', draw and paint western objects. These topics can be more Afrocentric. In the case of South Africa, they can be specific towards South African social, cultural and religious practices. An example could be in drawing wherein learners are asked to draw isphandla (wristband made from goat skin), umqhele (headband made from cow skin) or imbadada (Zulu traditional Sandal), rather than generic or foreign items. Another example is instead of generic tasks, such as 'Draw and paint pictures of self, interacting with others' (p. 34), learners can be requested to draw themselves with certain Zulu cultural activities (DOE CAPS, Grade R-3 2011). Basically, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document and its content are designed in a generic way that it can fit into any other context outside Africa; there is nothing specific or referenced to Africa, its culture, ways of life or religion.

By implication, the original design did not intend to cater for or embrace African mindset, identity and needs. This prepares an African child to be foreign in knowledge and thinking, rather than seeing him or herself in the curriculum (Masenya 2021). Coloniality in Africa is not only reflected in schools but also embedded in African leadership, policies and structures. (Shackleton & Gwedla 2021). The alienness and negative impacts of coloniality in Africa's education systems led to the call for decolonised education in Africa. Calls for decolonising education first emerged on the African continent in the context of decolonising struggles against colonial rule during the 1950s and 1960s (Fataar 2018). It is based on a negation of modern colonial education whose organising principle centred on shaping the colonised into

colonial subjects, in the process, stripping them of their humanity and full potential (Fataar 2018). This is evidence that coloniality has not only penetrated the daily life of an average African in Africa but has got filtered into the school system. Education being the key target of coloniality is an asset through which foreign culture, language, tradition and other forms of lifestyles are permeated through the primary school curriculum into Africans from their childhood.

Exploring coloniality in primary schools in the context of culture in South Africa

Culture is a multifaceted and dynamic aspect of human society that profoundly influences every facet of life, including education. The importance of school culture cannot be over-emphasised as the connection of the school's culture with its vision and objective is crucial for learning (Lebesa 2015). In primary schools, the influence of culture is particularly significant, shaping the experiences, values and perspectives of both students and educators. Ambrose (2021) notes that school culture serves as an intricate network of traditions and rituals, evolving gradually through the collective efforts of teachers, students, parents and administrators as they navigate challenges and celebrate successes. These enduring cultural patterns significantly influence performance and shape the thoughts, actions and emotions of those within the school community. Primary schools often serve as a miniature version of diverse societies as they bring students from various cultural backgrounds together, bringing with them a rich tapestry of traditions, languages and belief systems.

Coloniality, however, produces school cultures that vary from societal culture. In primary schools in South Africa, the legacy of colonialism continues to shape the way schools are run and the way students are taught. The current education system is designed within the structure of the Western education system, which was forcefully introduced to replace African indigenous systems during the colonial and apartheid regimes (Phaswana 2021; Tella & Motala 2020). This structure maintains that every learner undergoes similar content from primary school, allocated into a procession of grades and assigned into separate classes with a teacher in each class to disseminate structural knowledge to these learners (Mosweunyane 2013). Although schools and their activities are controlled by a School Management Team (SMT); however, the SMT, school culture and systems are guided by regulated foreign policies in the African education system. This structure operates in all schools, regardless of their quintiles or socio-economic backgrounds of the schools (Schirmer & Visser 2023).

Children are introduced to this organisational structure in primary schools in South Africa, designed to guide them to secondary and tertiary institutions. Despite the consistent curriculum and policy reformation, 80% of learners in South Africa still attend poorly functioning schools in rural communities and townships (Christie 2020;

Ngobeni, Chbambo & Divala 2023). In Early Childhood Education (ECD), children in this category (quintile 1 or 2) have 18.1% attendance at school. A few numbers of children, born into a family with Western culture and classed with advantaged socio-economic backgrounds attend paying-fees schools (well-resourced schools) where the school context strictly reflects the European and Western school culture (quintile 5) (Christie 2020; Ngobeni et al. 2023). Attendance in this latter category could go beyond 60%.

Therefore, the majority of students who are in black schools where African language and culture dominate, mostly quintiles 1 and 2 perform relatively below their counterparts whose language and culture are Western or have been Westernised (Christie 2020; Stats SA 2020). Colonialism institutionalised racial and socioeconomic inequalities and affects access to quality education (Mgqwashu 2019). Schools in historically disadvantaged areas often have limited resources and poorer infrastructure. Mgqwashu (2019) thus argues for the importance of marginalised communities to access knowledge and skills valued by the mainstream society to allow them to navigate their current world while advocating for equal recognition, a decolonised education system and liberation.

Formal education serves as a key strategy used in indoctrinating coloniality mentality into the African culture, a means that was catalysed by Christian Missionary efforts (Selhausen 2019). The impact of colonialism on primary school culture in South Africa can be observed through various aspects such as its influence on the indigenous language and communication, curriculum content, cultural influence, education access and inequality, teacher training and worldview, cultural identity and awareness (Selhausen 2019). Evidently, the colonial rule ushered in the complex interplay of cultures, ideologies and power dynamics that continue to shape primary schools in the country to this day. Malisa and Missedja (2019) also support the view that colonial education is instrumental in shaping colonial mindsets, with the curriculum playing a crucial role. Western culture was originally designed to create a divide between the Western and non-Western systems as asserted by Govindasami (2021); hence, South Africa's primary school curriculum predominantly promotes Western knowledge.

The colonial-era curriculum in South Africa often emphasised European history, literature and values, neglecting indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. British colonialism led to the widespread adoption of the English language as the medium of instruction in schools. As much as this serves certain advantages such as a *lingua franca* and a unifying communication system among the multilingual context that characterises South Africa (Phaswana 2021). However, without English, Africans would have had their *lingua franca* that would not have been alien but most likely would have been rich enough to represent Africanism. With this, the Western world would have had no choice but to accept it as a language to penetrate social, economic and political systems in Africa (Christie 2020).

In the primary school context in South Africa, the language of instruction varies based on the different provinces in the country. There have been efforts to promote indigenous African languages in education to preserve cultural diversity and address historical inequalities. Some schools offer instruction in languages such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Setswana and others, particularly in the provinces where these languages are used to embrace and inculcate indigenous languages of the country. It keeps the learners in touch with their sense of identity and origin while learning and helps to build a collaborative classroom where teachers can codeswitch or encourage it as a scaffold to learning new content in their language asset (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour 2019).

Nevertheless, English language is still commonly used as a language of instruction in many schools as it is often the language of learning for various subjects. At the primary school level, one of the 11 official languages is encouraged to be used between Grades 1 and 3 as learners' indigenous languages. English language becomes the dominant language of instruction from Grade 4 till matric. According to CAPS, from Grade 4, English is compulsory but does not replace indigenous languages in any educational institution in the country. The clause that provides English as a compulsory subject and language of most written instruction signals the prestige attribute ascribed to it over African languages (DBE 2011).

On the contrary, today, English remains the dominant language of education in South Africa contributing to a linguistic divide. Many teachers in South Africa were trained under colonial education systems, impacting their ability to provide linguistically and culturally sensitive and inclusive education. It is therefore a misconception that offering equal access and free education to all children in South Africa will silence the coloniality and the injury of colonialism. It is also taken for granted that the bequeathed foreign education system, the Eurocentric and Western superiority will be naturalised as the pathway to critical thinking and learning. However, it is argued that this system of education ignores African values, culture, language and local needs of the people. The curriculum is designed to scale English language as the language of knowledge, school and instruction right from primary school (Ezeanya-Esiobu 2019; Yamada 2018). Learners are made to speak and think in a language that is foreign, while the subject contents are designed to make them fit for city life, office life and be Eurocentric to be tagged as civilised (Yamada 2018). This is the detriment to the African language, thinking, history, culture and pride of its identity (Christie 2020). There is therefore a need to disrupt the current educational structures of primary schools in South Africa. At the primary school level, the curriculum should be a learning curve through which an African child is connected to his or her history, homegrown ecology, society, culture and spirituality (Schirmer & Visser 2023).

However, Govindasami (2021) argues that it is crucial to conduct foundational research on decolonisation to recognise and value indigenous knowledge systems and to effect transformative changes within the curriculum. The legacy of

colonialism has led to challenges in cultural identity for learners, as Western ideals and values sometimes overshadow indigenous cultures and traditions. British colonialism imposed Western cultural norms and values, including dress codes and religious practices, on the indigenous population. These influences continue to shape certain aspects of school culture.

Recent efforts have aimed at revising the primary school curriculum to incorporate more indigenous content, promote local languages and highlight the region's cultural heritage. Ongoing initiatives to incorporate indigenous knowledge, languages and cultural practices into the curriculum are essential for fostering cultural identity and a more inclusive primary school culture. Communities in KwaZulu-Natal province, for instance, actively engage with schools to promote cultural awareness and preservation through initiatives such as cultural festivals and workshops (Cindi 2021). Embracing cultural diversity and promoting cultural sensitivity within primary schools enriches the educational experience and prepares students for an increasingly globalised world.

Restructuring and decolonising education in South Africa

Lopez and Rugano (2018) argue that colonised history and knowledge must be disrupted in whatever space it is found, especially as it has been used as a tool to undermine indigenous people. Phaswana (2021) indicates that there is a common understanding that the current form of education in South Africa and in Africa is problematic as it is biased and promotes European or Western values and ways of knowing and being known at the expense of others. The student protests of 2015–2016 in South Africa called for the decolonisation of higher education spaces and initiated discussion on decolonised education in South African schools (Du Plessis 2021).

Decolonisation of education calls for an overhaul of the Western knowledge canon and the incorporation of knowledge pluralisation. Decolonising education is based on the inclusion of all knowledge forms bequeathed to humanity (Fataar 2018). All knowledge forms must be brought into play in intercultural education that promotes a type of epistemic openness to the knowledge of all human beings and the call for decolonising education is nothing less than the full incorporation of humanity's knowledge systems into the curriculum and knowledge selection systems of universities and schools (Fataar 2018). The decolonisation of education in South Africa should thus involve marginalised people embracing and recognising their own cultures and forming institutions based on values that are reflective of African culture, as opposed to Eurocentric models (Du Plessis 2021).

Education is a universal phenomenon and should therefore not be based or underpinned by a particular assumed superior former colonial power (Massey-Jones 2019).

Decolonising education allows students and learners to have a better understanding and appreciation of their backgrounds and way of life (Massey Jones 2019). In an article by Naidu-Hoffmeester (2021), two South African professors, Zodwa Motsa and Edith Phaswana share their views on what decolonised education should look like in South Africa and in Africa. In the article, Motsa describes the decolonisation of education as the dismantling of knowledge, language and cultures that reinforce colonial ideologies (see Naidu-Hoffmeester 2021). She further notes that decolonisation involves dismantling pillars that sustain Euro-American cultures while muting African indigenous knowledge and cultures; hence, decolonisation of education is the eradication of colonialist epistemologies and social practices to centralise Africa's own. Similarly, Phaswana as cited in Naidu-Hoffmeester's (2021) article states that decolonisation of education involves incorporating humanity's knowledge systems into the curriculum and knowledge selection systems of schools and universities, not just Western knowledge. This would thus require a mental shift from a single worldview (Eurocentric) and understanding of the world to a more pluralistic view and adds that in Africa, this would entail the process of Africanisation that recognises the validity and relevance of African knowledge in the global knowledge production (ibid). For instance, African indigenous knowledge should be included in the global knowledge system and recognised as part of human knowledge within curriculums, and this entails removing colonial languages as languages of instruction and power on the continent (Hirsch 2020).

Motsa according to Naidu-Hoffmeester (2021) avers that decolonising education can be a reality in South Africa because it has been practised for many decades in various African educational institutions citing the 1966 Makerere Convention, which birthed the African Writers' Series (books) as one clear act of decolonisation that led to the admission of African Literature into the mainstream or canon of English Literature. She also cites the indigenisation of glossaries at the University of South Africa (UNISA) as a form of decolonisation and indigenisation, as knowledge and information are presented and accessed in the student's own language and lens beyond the West. Also, as an example, Fataar (2018) as cited by Simphiwe Sesanti's (2021) article pleads for teaching ancient Egyptian ethics and history as a cornerstone of an Afrocentric decolonial curriculum knowledge approach and argues that such a perspective will help to challenge the continuing dominance of colonial scholarship in South African universities. If there is a will to decolonise education systems in South Africa, it can be done. The case of the Ufasimba Primary School attests to this as it emerged as a school where the School Environmental Education Programme (SEEP) was used to decolonise the curriculum (Zimu-Biyela 2019).

The first step towards decolonisation of education is decolonising the mind as cognitive change is the key to all and any other form of change (see Adefila et al. 2022; Naidu-Hoffmeester 2021). In this vein, Du Plessis (2021) notes that in

decolonising classrooms, one must examine oneself and let go of the disingenuous notion of objectivity in the classroom, of maintaining political neutrality, of seeing all sides and positions as having equal impact on marginalised groups. Sharing a few ideas on how South Africa and Africa can go about decolonising education and the curriculum, Phaswana in Naidu-Hoffmeester's (2021) article states that there needs to be a centring of all cultures and values systems in Africa's education systems and a decentring of colonial languages in the curriculum. In addition, schools, colleges and universities should cultivate respect for people and their cultural and knowledge systems and respect the coexistence of cultural diversity in curriculum development. The decolonisation of education should thereby entail the normalisation of Africanness within the curriculum, and this will translate into staffing reorganisation and re-engineering of educational structures (See Naidu-Hoffmeester 2021; Tella & Motala 2020). Thus, within South Africa, the experiences and knowledge of formerly colonised people must be foregrounded, and their traditions must inform and shape the practice as alternative ontological and epistemological ways of knowing, what must be centred, understood and practised (Du Plessis 2021).

From the perspectives and recommendations offered by the various authors in this section, it is apparent that the decolonisation of education begins with decolonising the mind. As Motsa posits, cognitive change is foundational to any substantive transformation within educational systems. This aligns perfectly with the aims of this study, which seeks to explore and advocate for comprehensive strategies for decolonising education in South Africa and across Africa. The emphasis on self-examination and the rejection of purported objectivity in educational settings, as noted by Du Plessis (2021), resonates with the need for educators to critically assess their biases and understand the power dynamics at play in the dissemination of knowledge. This approach challenges the status quo and recognises that not all perspectives have an equal impact on marginalised groups, thus prioritising the voices and experiences of those historically sidelined.

Phaswana in Naidu-Hoofsteen (2021) further enriches this discourse by advocating for the centring of African cultures and value systems within educational systems, alongside the decentring of colonial languages in the curriculum. The call for cultivating respect for diverse cultural and knowledge systems is paramount to creating inclusive educational environments that celebrate rather than marginalise differences. The normalisation of Africanness, as Phaswana suggests, involves significant structural changes, including staffing reorganisations and the re-engineering of educational frameworks to better reflect and respect African epistemologies and ontologies. Drawing from the insights of these scholars, this study adopts the view that decolonising education is a multifaceted process that requires both individual and systemic change.

Decolonising the curriculum is linked to the concept of ubuntu that celebrates the oneness of the self and others in creating the stimulus for a more humane world for all. Hlatshwayo (2023) argues for the need for an ubuntu current that is anchored by and underpinned by a decolonial social contract that will take stock of and respond to the coloniality of being, coloniality of power and the coloniality of knowledge that the South African educational institutions are currently facing. Decolonisation of education is a matter of social justice as it will assist in disrupting colonial legacies that are ever present in Africa and redressing the injustices of the past. Above all, it will enable learners and students to take pride in and appreciate their identity. The section 'Re-positioning and reconstruction of South African schools: Towards decolonisation' focuses on how South African primary schools can be divested of coloniality and be repositioned and reconstructed to reflect African paradigms and epistemologies (Mitova 2020; Olsson 2023).

Re-positioning and reconstruction of South African schools: Towards decolonisation

Having deliberated on the importance of decolonising education in South Africa and ways in which it can be carried out, it must be noted that this process must take place in all educational institutions at all levels. There is, however, often a tendency to focus on higher education. However, it is critical that the decolonisation process starts at the primary school level as it is the foundational stage where attitudes, beliefs and perceptions are formed (Schirmer & Visser 2023). According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), primary education is the bedrock of development, and it is where children learn foundational skills that prepare them for life, work and active citizenship. If learners are exposed to decolonialised education at this level, it stands to reason that it is easier to remove or curtail colonial notions and legacies. According to Thobejane (2023), there is a need to review the education model into what will best suit the present democratic dispensation in the country. Therefore, de-colonising education is essential.

Thus, the decolonisation of primary schools in South Africa first requires a thorough review of the primary school curriculum. This should involve questioning what is currently taught and what is left out of the learner's education in terms of knowledge. Western knowledge should no longer be prioritised, and African indigenous knowledge should be incorporated into the curriculum, thereby pluralising knowledge. Primary school education should be remodelled in a manner whereby the various cultures of the country are recognised and interwoven within the educational system. Drawing from Du Plessis's (2021) statement, primary schools should be remodelled in a manner that embraces and recognises local culture, the teaching of African history, the use of African textbooks and school values reflective of African culture. The curricula thus

could be revised to include historically excluded stories from textbooks such as legends and cultural values of the indigenous people before the arrival of the colonialists. This will enable pedagogies in primary schools to be more inclusive as it will embrace open-ended, multilingual and multicultural practices.

Weiner (2016) corroborates this point that the civilisation of the indigenous people needs to be incorporated in primary school textbooks, as this will bring the fillip for a better appreciation of the history of primary school students. Thus, this will help to develop a balanced mindset in advancing into the future, bringing in its wake, the complete dismantling of biased coloniality education in primary schools. Heritage appreciation as an example could go beyond the annual celebration and be crafted either as a subject or embedded into the curriculum, right from the foundation phase to FET (Department of Sport, Arts and Culture 2021). This could be the basis of the rise of heritage and the reconstitution of history in South Africa as advocated by Rassool (2000). There should in short be a normalisation of Africanness within the curriculum and in all facets of the primary school system. The decolonial transformation should not only be confined to the curriculum but also to the values and conduct of the primary school systems. The concept of ubuntu should be upheld as a major value in primary schools and factors such as dress code and hairstyle should be reviewed and modified to reflect an African mode. Learners should be further encouraged to think, act and behave like Africans, and the use of vernacular languages must be fully promoted.

The call for decolonial transformation extends beyond mere curriculum adjustments to encompass the very ethos and behaviours fostered within primary school systems. This involves the embrace of ubuntu, a principle highlighting communal interdependence, as a core value. For instance, dress codes and hairstyles currently enforced should be reassessed and adapted to reflect African traditions and aesthetics more accurately (Isiorhovoja, 2021; Moodley, 2021), thereby fostering a sense of identity and belonging among students. Furthermore, examples such as encouraging students to engage with and celebrate African ways of thinking, acting and problem-solving, as well as advocating for the comprehensive incorporation of vernacular languages into the educational framework (Selhausen, 2019; Makhanya, 2020), exemplify the practical measures that can be taken. This approach not only honours the rich cultural heritage of Africa but also promotes a learning environment where students are inspired to fully embody and express their African identity.

Reiterating Du Plessis (2021), the experiences and knowledge of formerly colonised South Africans must inform and shape practice and ontological and epistemological ways of knowing. In addition to some of the above recommendations on decolonising primary schools in South Africa, the authors provided further recommendations, outlined in this section,

that could be used by the state, legislators, educators and communities to accomplish this crucial goal. The following are recommended.

Dialogical engagement

Creation of platforms and forums for inclusive discussions involving educators, pupils, parents, residents and other pertinent parties. These debates should foster open discourse and the free exchange of ideas regarding the necessity of decolonisation in the educational system. Discussion should include the colonial influences on South African education's historical, social and cultural ramifications. Moreover, there should be a recognition and identification of historical injustices and biases present in the current educational system.

Curriculum transformation

The curriculum should be reviewed: Efforts should be made to diversify the curriculum. Native knowledge systems, African viewpoints and marginalised histories should all be included in the curriculum. This should capture South Africa's rich cultural and historical variety. A sophisticated comprehension of South Africa's history and societal settings should be fostered via the new curriculum, which should also promote critical thinking. This entails progressing from rote memorisation towards the development of analytical and critical thinking skills.

Teacher training and professional development

Teacher training programmes that give educators the pedagogical know-how and knowledge necessary to support decolonised education should be developed and rolled out. These courses should embody cutting-edge pedagogy and creative teaching strategies. Educators should be encouraged to examine their prejudices and assumptions through self-reflection and self-awareness. Workshops, seminars and continuing professional development that questions accepted paradigms can be employed to this end.

Multilingual education

To recognise the linguistic diversity of South Africa, the usage of several languages in the classroom should be encouraged. This does not necessarily mean that teachers should be proficient in all languages, but they can offer learning materials that relate to a variety of different identities and experiences, make use of multilingual labels and invite students to share their language or culture.

Educational resources and materials in regional languages should also be developed. This will promote better understanding and make learning more accessible to pupils.

Inclusive pedagogy

Inclusive educational strategies that encourage project-based learning, cooperative learning and problem-solving should be promoted. This entails making environments safe

for open discussion and appreciating the worth of various viewpoints.

Community engagement

Local community, parents and other caregivers in educational activities should be involved in the educational process. Parent-teacher organisations, neighbourhood gatherings and group decision-making should be organised to this end. Such interactions will garner valuable input for the decolonisation process.

Equitable resource allocation

Resources such as money, books and infrastructure should be allocated fairly to reduce inequities. There should be no quintiles but one standard of the schooling system for all learners.

Assessment and evaluation

Instead of strictly adhering to Eurocentric norms, assessments should consider the larger learning objectives. Alternate methods of evaluation should be identified that place an emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving and knowledge application. All contents and assessments should be contextualised to what is feasible in the African context or what promotes it.

Research and monitoring

To inform policy and practice, ongoing rigorous research should be conducted. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems should be further established to track the decolonisation of schools' progress. Regular evaluations can assist in identifying areas that need more work and improvement.

Policy reform

Legislation that expressly encourages cultural sensitivity, diversity and inclusivity in the educational system should be promoted. This should be backed by supervision and accountability systems for policy compliance and impact.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that education at the primary school level is very important as mental formation is birthed at that level. To this end, the Department of Basic Education in South Africa needs to review the primary school curriculum with a view to revising it in a manner that will suit a multi-racial South Africa in the 21st century where all the represented races will have their history and culture represented in their learning and development stage. This will build the necessary confidence among the learners, especially those from rural and peri-urban settlements. The department will have to re-train primary school teachers towards a decolonised curriculum so that the

teachers themselves would be weaned from relics of the colonial mindset that views African indigenous education as inferior.

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Authors' contributions

E.S.A., C.A.H., U.J.A. and O.A.A. collaborated to deliberate on the idea before the actual desktop research began. All the authors researched recent and relevant trends in the discourse of the study and equally contributed to the conceptualisation, methodology, analysis and results of the study. They all participated in the writing, review and critical editing of the final article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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