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## The prospects and challenges of indigenising Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)' curriculum in South Africa

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### ABSTRACT

*Indigenisation and decolonisation, though conceptually related concepts, are unequivocally vital catalysts for effective curriculum transformation in South Africa. This article examines the prospects and challenges of indigenising higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country. A secondary literature review was conducted, drawing data from multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, ResearchGate, EBSCOhost, and the Walter Sisulu University (WSU) library. The review identified several promising developments in advancing the indigenisation agenda, such as: The introduction of degree programmes centred on Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) at selected universities; Increased advocacy and dialogue (indaba) on the indigenisation and decolonisation of the curriculum; A growing movement calling for comprehensive curriculum transformation across the higher education sector; The expanded and diverse application of the Ubuntu philosophy within academic discourse; and The implementation of South Africa's Curriculum Transformation Framework. Despite these positive strides, several challenges continue to hinder the process of indigenisation. These include: The entrenched legacy of colonialism and the persistent influence of Eurocentrism within the education system; Insufficient resources to effectively implement indigenisation and decolonisation strategies; Resistance and limited enthusiasm from some stakeholders within academia; The continued dominance of colonial languages in African education policies; and a lack of consensus regarding the definition and scope of "decolonisation." This article seeks to enrich and advance the discourse on indigenisation and decolonisation. The two terms, though conceptually related, exhibit subtle differences and serve as vehicles for advancing a more Afrocentric, contextually relevant approach to curriculum transformation in South Africa.*

**KEY TERMS:** curriculum transformation, decolonization, indigenization, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), Ubuntu philosophy

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper begins by examining the concept of indigenisation, which refers to the process of increasing the participation, ownership, and influence of local or indigenous people within a country's economy, leadership, industries, culture, education, and governance often through the reduction of foreign or external control (Nomngcoyiya et al., 2022). According to Nomngcoyiya et al. (2022), indigenisation entails bringing systems, structures, and practices under the authority or influence of indigenous communities within their native contexts. Horsthemke (2017) further contends that indigenisation represents a radical endorsement of Africanisation and Afrocentrism, marking a broader ideological shift toward valuing indigenous perspectives and epistemologies. Put simply, indigenisation can be understood as the process of making systems or institutions more locally grounded by increasing the participation, presence, and authority of indigenous peoples, practices, and ownership structures ultimately aimed at enhancing their economic, social, and cultural well-being (Sangha et al., 2024). Throughout the paper, both the subtle distinctions and the similarities between indigenisation and decoloniality are carefully illuminated. After the introduction, the paper presents the background, problem statement, methodology, and then discusses the prospects and challenges of indigenizing Higher Education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa.

## BACKGROUND

Unpacking and widening the scope of the concept of indigenisation, it can be understood through various eclectic lenses, including economic and cultural perspectives. Economically, indigenisation often involves transferring ownership or control of businesses, industries, and resources to local citizens. This process promotes local entrepreneurship, increases employment opportunities, and reduces dependency on foreign companies or investors, thereby strengthening indigenous control over national resources (Tshikovhi, 2021). According to Cohen and Kaminitz contribute expansion of local resources and economic activity contributes to a country's Gross National Product (GNP) growth. Chitonge (2025) argues that a country can only be considered truly developed when its local population has significantly indigenised its economy and exercises substantial control over development processes and industrialisation. In this sense, indigenisation is not only a desirable goal but may be viewed as a panacea for achieving national development and self-determination (Nomngcoyiya et al., 2022).

This researcher believes that the embracement and implementation of the multilingualism agenda in South Africa, which is supported by the South African constitution, could play a significant role in indigenising the curriculum. Conceptually, the multilingual agenda seeks equality among languages relegated to the periphery or rendered inconsequential in the learning arena. These were the schemes of the South African colonial masters. The success of the agenda will allow instructors and learners to use their indigenous languages to better understand the concepts, rather than having to struggle with them in English. The multilingual agenda advocates and encourages the promotion of indigenous languages that were previously marginalised during Apartheid. This agenda can significantly contribute to the indigenisation of the curriculum because language is closely linked to culture, identity, and indigenous knowledge systems (Mkhize & Balfour, 2017).

This researcher believes that the journey of indigenising the curriculum closely aligns with global imperatives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, CESA (The continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025), and the fulfilment of Agenda 2063's aspirations. This is because the SDGs emphasize inclusive, equitable, quality education and sustainable development globally, as provided for by SDG 4, which espouses inclusive education; SDG 11, which aims to achieve sustainable communities; and SDG 13 and 15, which drive improvements in climate action and life on land (United Nations, 2015). While CESA is the African Union's strategy to transform education in Africa, it emphasizes African-centered education and supports innovation in research (African Union Commission, 2025). On the other hand, indigenising the curriculum aligns with the Agenda 2063 (The Africa we want). The following aspirations linked to Agenda 2063 are key to indigenisation. Aspiration 1: Prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth; Aspiration 5: achieving a strong cultural identity, heritage, and values; Aspiration 6: Achieving people-driven development (African Union, n.d.).

### *Indigenising the South African HEIs' curricula*

Unequivocally, the process of indigenising curricula in South Africa's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) requires the deliberate implementation of strategies that align with and integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into academic programmes (Le Grange, 2023). This involves embedding local cultures, knowledge systems, community needs, languages, and the aspirations of indigenous peoples into the curriculum. Fundamentally, this process entails a shift in policy and practice in curriculum design—one that incorporates traditional knowledge, local histories, and indigenous ways of life, including oral storytelling, governance systems, and other cultural expressions (Dlakavu et al., 2022). The success of these processes of indigenisation will be optimal if the systems

embrace decoloniality to undo the pernicious and lasting effects of colonialism in epistemologies of culture, politics, and society. This is why the processes of indigenisation and decolonisation constitute inextricable terms for the success of indigenising the curriculum. The two terms, despite subtle differences, reinforce one another in the war towards curriculum transformation in the South African context (Kang'ethe, 2023).

Crucially, this curriculum transformation requires collaboration with traditional leaders, elders, and indigenous scholars to co-create new or hybrid forms of knowledge content. Such inclusive engagement ensures that curricula are not only reflective of indigenous realities but also validated through community participation (Kugara & Mdhluli, 2023). Moreover, the curriculum must actively promote African philosophies, indigenous languages, epistemologies, and worldviews, positioning them alongside, rather than subordinate to, Western academic frameworks (Takhar, 2023). This dual approach fosters epistemic justice and contributes to a more holistic, inclusive, and contextually relevant higher education landscape in South Africa.

Furthermore, indigenising the curriculum entails transforming, revising, and adapting educational content to include and value indigenous ways of knowing, being, and learning—thereby making education more inclusive, authentic, and empowering for all students (Smith, 2012). This process ensures that the curriculum reflects, respects, and integrates Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), histories, cultures, worldviews, and languages (Dei, 2014). The goal is to advance an Afrocentric educational paradigm that challenges the dominance of Western-centrism and disrupts the hegemonic influence of Eurocentric content, which has historically marginalised and silenced African perspectives (Dei, 2014). By centring indigenous knowledge and epistemologies, the curriculum not only affirms the identities and lived experiences of African students but also promotes a more balanced, pluralistic, and contextually relevant academic environment (Dei, 2014).

Achieving curriculum indigenisation is widely recognised as a critical milestone in many African countries, primarily because most education systems on the continent were historically shaped by colonial or Western influences that often excluded or marginalised indigenous perspectives. The indigenisation process, therefore, seeks to address historical injustices and epistemic imbalances by correcting biases and omissions, promoting cultural relevance and identity among Indigenous students, and fostering greater understanding and respect among non-Indigenous students. Moreover, it supports broader reconciliation efforts in post-colonial societies, where education plays a pivotal role in shaping national identity and promoting social cohesion (Dei, 2014).

There is no doubt that an inextricable relationship exists between indigenisation and the decolonisation of the curriculum. These two concepts manifest subtle differences, but are fundamentally interconnected, as the process of indigenisation directly contributes to the broader goal of decolonisation (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Sewpaul et al., 2021). Advancing indigenisation necessarily involves dismantling colonial structures and epistemologies, thereby expanding the cultural, political, and economic agency of local communities. Within the educational sphere, this translates into addressing the deep-rooted barriers imposed by colonial legacies, positioning curriculum transformation as a central site of both struggle and renewal (Sewpaul et al., 2021).

Regarding decolonisation, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's foundational work remains profoundly influential. His seminal text, *Decolonising the Mind* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986), is widely regarded as a pivotal intellectual intervention that challenges African societies to dismantle colonial hegemony by reclaiming indigenous languages, thought systems, and cultural expressions. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work thus laid the groundwork for much of the contemporary discourse on indigenisation as a critical pathway toward decolonisation. Furthermore, the call for decolonisation—particularly within disciplines such as social work—has been echoed by prominent scholars and advocates, including Gray et al. (2014), Osei-Hwedie (1996), Mupedziswa (1996), and, more recently, Simon Murote Kang'ethe (2014). These thought leaders have consistently argued for a decolonised and Afrocentric paradigm, not only within social work but across all academic disciplines, positioning indigenisation as both a means and an end in the pursuit of epistemic justice and intellectual sovereignty in Africa.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite persistent and concerted calls by scholars such as Osei-Hwedie, Roderick Mupedziswa, and, more recently, Professor Simon Murote Kang'ethe, urging African governments to strengthen the Afrocentric content of their national curricula, progress toward meaningful curriculum indigenisation has remained frustratingly slow. As Kang'ethe (2024) observes, many indigenisation initiatives have remained largely theoretical, with limited translation into practical and systemic implementation. Consequently, curricula in many African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), including those in South Africa, continue to be dominated by Eurocentric paradigms that fail to adequately reflect the continent's diverse cultural, social, and developmental realities. This enduring colonial legacy significantly undermines HEIs' capacity to address pressing local challenges, such as poverty, inequality, gender disparities, and the pursuit of sustainable development. While indigenisation holds the promise of fostering cultural pride, academic relevance, and the development of contextually grounded knowledge, it remains a contested and under-implemented agenda across much of the continent.

Several critical barriers continue to hinder the full realisation of curriculum transformation. These include entrenched structural resistance within academic institutions, limited financial and human resources, inadequate

policy frameworks, and a general lack of societal readiness to fully embrace Afrocentric perspectives. Of particular concern is the persistent perception—among educators and the broader public alike—that Western knowledge systems are inherently superior, a mindset that continues to impede progress toward genuine indigenisation and decolonisation of African higher education. Conversely, South Africa has made notable progress in advancing the indigenisation of its higher education curricula. Several institutions have introduced degree programmes in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), while the University of South Africa (UNISA) has successfully integrated IKS into its Environmental Education (EE) modules. The country has also witnessed a rise in curriculum advocacy indabas, a vibrant national discourse on indigenisation, and the increased application of Ubuntu philosophy within academic frameworks. Furthermore, the development and implementation of comprehensive Curriculum Transformation Frameworks demonstrate a growing institutional commitment to educational reform. Given these encouraging developments, there is an urgent need to critically examine both the prospects and challenges of indigenising curricula in South African Higher Education Institutions. Such an examination is essential to inform actionable strategies that promote epistemic justice and drive meaningful educational transformation across the continent. Optimistically, the success of the South African process of indigenisation can be a benchmark for other African countries

## METHODOLOGY

This article employed a traditional literature review methodology, sourcing relevant literature from a range of academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, ResearchGate, EBSCOhost, and the Walter Sisulu University (WSU) library. The inclusion criteria, therefore, involved selecting articles from the above databases using keywords such as *indigenisation*, *decolonisation*, *curriculum indigenisation*, and *curriculum transformation* to identify scholarly works that offer insights into the prospects and challenges of curriculum indigenisation in South Africa and Africa more broadly. Given the discourse on indigenisation's historical antecedents, the researcher also incorporated seminal works that trace the evolution of the concept. This is reflected in the inclusion of foundational references, such as Professor Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 1986 work (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 1986), which continues to shape contemporary debates on curriculum transformation and decolonization. This formed an important contribution to the article's inclusion criteria. Moreover, reference to the work of social work fathers of indigenisation on social work curricula, such as Professor Osei Hwedie, Roderick Mupedziswa, and Simon Murote Kang'ethe, has also remained salient in the context of indigenisation and, therefore, constitutes the inclusion criteria. On the contrary, the exclusion criteria excluded articles that did not address curriculum transformation in South Africa. Data was analysed thematically.

### Prospects of indigenising HEI's curricula in South Africa.

#### *Promulgating degrees in the Indigenous knowledge system*

In response to the growing clarion call across the African continent for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to pursue curriculum indigenisation and decolonisation (Gray et al., 2014; Kang'ethe, 2014; Osei-Hwedie, 1996; Mupedziswa, 1997), isolated pockets of excellence have emerged that may inspire other contexts or form institutional benchmarks to inspire others. A commendable episode of the indigenisation process is the North-West University (NWU), through its Mahikeng Campus in South Africa, which took a significant step by launching a Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (BIKS) degree in 2013. This pioneering programme was developed through a collaborative initiative involving NWU, the University of Limpopo, the University of Venda, the National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Office under the Department of Science and Technology, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), as well as indigenous knowledge holders and community representatives.

The BIKS programme, though on a smaller pioneering scale, represents a meaningful response to ongoing debates and demands for the decolonisation and indigenisation of curricula in South African higher education (Dei, 2014). Its establishment affirms the value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) within formal academic spaces, thereby promoting epistemic plurality and advancing academic inclusivity. Notably, the programme has since expanded to include postgraduate qualifications—master's and doctoral degrees—further entrenching IKS as a legitimate and vital field of scholarly inquiry (North-West University, n.d.). However, there is no meaningful evidence that this development has inspired other institutions of learning to start the initiative.

#### *UNISA's promulgation of the Environmental Education (EE) Module*

In line with the ongoing efforts to decolonise the curriculum, another institution, the University of South Africa (UNISA), has made a pioneering debut in successfully integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) content into the Environmental Education (EE) module of the Bachelor of Education Honours programme (Makokotlela

& Gumbo, 2024). The Environmental Education and Development (EED2601) module is an undergraduate year module at NQF Level 6, carrying 12 credits. Its primary purpose is to assist student teachers in examining key environmental issues such as land degradation, water supply, industrial pollution, poverty, overpopulation, and health that influence what, how, and why they teach.

A related module, Introduction to Environmental Education (IED1501), offered at NQF Level 5 as part of the Higher Certificate programme, introduces students to the concept of the environment and a broad range of environmental issues within the South African context (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2024). Importantly, the promulgation and inclusion of these modules contribute significantly to curricular transformation and enhance the decolonising relevance of teacher education at UNISA. The researcher argues that although this initiative may not have been replicated by other institutions, its promulgation represents a pioneering example that could inspire similar efforts elsewhere in the future.

#### *Increased Curriculum advocacy indaba on indigenisation and decolonisation*

An indaba on curriculum indigenisation and decolonisation is a multi-stakeholder platform for discussion and dialogue aimed at achieving epistemic justice and fostering social transformation. It serves as a forum for reflection, critical engagement, and the creation of new knowledge and perspectives (Le Grange, 2016). Such dialogues examine the injustices perpetuated by the existing curriculum and offer strategies for eliminating the biases that contribute to curricular inequities. Across South Africa, several universities have actively promoted curriculum indigenisation and decolonisation through hosting curriculum transformation indabas. These gatherings have played a key role in mapping curricula, identifying Eurocentric biases, engaging diverse stakeholders such as students, indigenous leaders, NGOs, and policymakers developing guiding frameworks for transformation, piloting projects in various faculties, and evaluating progress through ongoing dialogue and reflective practice (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2024). For instance, in July 2022, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) School of Social Sciences hosted a Curriculum Transformation Indaba, focusing on curriculum renewal grounded in decolonization, Africanization, and indigenization (UKZN, 2022). The Indaba called upon all universities to commit to comprehensive curriculum transformation by revisiting and revising existing programmes to eradicate epistemic injustice and strengthen the presence of Afrocentric content (Heleta, 2016). While these advocacy indabas are a platform that could turn around the poor indigenisation of the curriculum in the South African context, unfortunately, many institutions in South Africa continue to drag their feet on implementing indigenisation initiatives.

#### *Spirited Clarion call for indigenisation and decolonialisation of the curricula in SA*

Several advocacy bodies, such as the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI), have intensified efforts to strengthen and decolonise social work education in South Africa (Mogorosi & Thabede, 2018). Similarly, the South African government, through the Department of Social Development (DSD), has called for the indigenisation and Africanisation of social work education. For instance, in March 2015, the DSD convened a National Social Work Indaba in Durban, themed “*Revitalising Social Work Practice in South Africa*”, which emphasised the need for higher education institutions to respond more effectively to local community needs (Mogorosi & Thabede, 2015). This urgency likely arose from concerns that prevailing social work practices did not adequately address the specific needs of local communities (Turton & Schmid, 2020).

Dominant social work paradigms have been criticised for being culturally inappropriate, marginalising alternative knowledges, overlooking structural inequalities, and being costly or poorly suited to local contexts. The Indaba concluded with a call for social workers and educational institutions to develop a body of knowledge grounded in Afrocentric and culturally sensitive approaches to social work education (Nomngcoyiya et al., 2021).

Credit is also due to regional and global organisations that contribute to the decolonisation agenda, including the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council of Social Work (ICSW), and the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA). These bodies are increasingly advocating for countries worldwide to strengthen their efforts toward curriculum decolonisation and indigenisation (Twikirize et al., 2024).

#### *Increased and diverse applications of the Ubuntu philosophy in academic discourses*

Currently, several scholars, particularly in Africa, have emphasised the importance of Ubuntu philosophy as a tool for curriculum indigenisation and decolonisation (Kang’ethe, 2023; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). According to Kang’ethe (2024), Ubuntu originates from the Xhosa aphorism “*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, meaning “*I am because you are.*” This philosophy embodies the expression and embraces of humanity, fostering a communitarian spirit, mutual support, and collective responsibility. Closely linked to Afrocentrism and Africanization, Ubuntu serves as a powerful driver of indigenization and, by extension, decolonisation.

An Ubuntu-informed curriculum, grounded in Afrocentric values, inherently promotes cultural sensitivity, diversity, and responsiveness to local needs, thereby strengthening both indigenisation and decolonisation efforts (Nomngcoyiya et al., 2021). In practice, Ubuntu encourages a shift away from Eurocentric paradigms toward African-centered knowledge systems (IKS), supporting the inclusion of African languages, oral traditions, storytelling, proverbs, and histories within the curriculum (Dei, 2014). Furthermore, Ubuntu advocates for a holistic educational approach that nurtures learners intellectually, socially, emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. An Ubuntu-based curriculum is also values-driven, emphasising empathy, cooperation, respect, and responsibility. It reinforces moral and civic education rooted in indigenous ethics, fostering education that is both culturally relevant and transformative (Kang'ethe, 2023, 2024).

#### *South Africa's commendable case of the curriculum transformation framework*

The frameworks for curriculum transformation in South Africa aim to make education more Afrocentric by removing apartheid-era content, addressing inequalities and inequities, and making the curriculum more inclusive, lifelong-learning oriented, environmentally conscious, and supportive of indigenous knowledge (Mawere et al., 2022). The goal is to create a curriculum that is relevant to all learners, embracing social justice, broadening educational pathways to include vocational and occupational options, improving teacher quality and assessment systems, and incorporating cross-cutting competencies such as digital literacy and citizenship. Moreover, some successes have been noted within this framework. For example, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has conducted extensive public consultations for the Draft South African Competency Framework, involving teachers, learners, local and provincial officials, civil society, and business representatives (Selelo & Manamela, 2024). Curriculum strengthening—focused on enhancing existing curricula rather than rewriting them—has been planned with significant stakeholder input. There has been a clear shift towards infusing competencies, including skills, values, character development, and digital literacy, alongside traditional content. Importantly, this strengthening process is designed to impact no more than 20% of subjects, avoiding major overhauls that could destabilize teaching (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013).

In the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, curriculum transformation has involved the reorganization of institutions through mergers and the reduction of program duplication, enabling them to become more responsive to learner needs and the labour market (Department of Education, 2000). Efforts to increase teacher qualifications and professionalise teaching—especially in under-resourced areas—have been intensified. There is growing recognition of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and a concerted effort to incorporate greater epistemological diversity. Language policy has been adjusted over time to better include learners' home languages, particularly in the early grades (Republic of South Africa, 2023).

Curriculum strengthening also includes integrating key themes such as digital skills, climate change, and citizenship, as well as broadening learner options by leveraging vocational and occupational streams. Systematic evaluations continue to be conducted for grades 3, 6, and 9 to ensure ongoing improvement and relevance (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013).

#### **Challenges to indigenising curricula**

Axiomatically, the path toward indigenising and decolonising the curriculum in South Africa is both challenging and uneven. This is largely because the curriculum remains deeply embedded in Western-centric epistemologies and content (Dei, 2014; Le Grange, 2023). Moreover, South Africa's apartheid history and its enduring legacy further complicate and intensify the difficulties inherent in the processes of indigenisation and decolonisation.

#### *The deep-rooted phenomenon of colonial legacy and eurocentrism in South African education systems*

One of the primary challenges in indigenising and decolonising the curriculum is that the operational curriculum continues to reflect predominantly Western epistemologies. These frameworks have historically marginalised African knowledge systems, including their distinctive epistemologies, histories, and languages (Dei, 2014; Le Grange, 2023). Furthermore, the sustained dominance of English as the principal medium of instruction reinforces colonial structures. Because English and, to a lesser extent, Afrikaans have been privileged as the lingua franca, they have constrained efforts to elevate indigenous languages to equal levels of status, legitimacy, and use. This environment compromises the growth of multilingualism, and therefore makes a lesser score in the SDGs, CESA, and Agenda 2063 (African Union Commission, 2025; African Union, n.d)

#### *Paucity of resources to effectuate indigenisation and decolonisation*

The campaigns, debates, and initiatives aimed at achieving indigenisation and decolonisation require substantial financial investment and expenditure that many African countries struggle to sustain. A persistent shortage of

resources hampers the production of textbooks and academic materials grounded in indigenous knowledge and perspectives (Motsaathebe, 2011). Moreover, some Afrocentric communities do not fully recognise the importance of replacing or integrating foreign languages, such as English, with indigenous languages. Publishers, in turn, are often reluctant to produce materials in indigenous languages because of limited readerships, low economic viability, and shrinking markets. As a result, there remains an insufficient level of goodwill and institutional support within many indigenous communities to advance the indigenisation process and to promote the publication of educational materials in indigenous languages (Motsaathebe, 2011).

#### *Scant enthusiasm and resistance to the indigenisation of the curriculum*

Studies by Kang'ethe (2024) indicate that the processes of indigenisation—and, to some extent, decolonisation—are progressing slowly across African countries, including South Africa. This slow pace is largely attributed to institutional resistance, as many stakeholders remain entrenched in colonial mindsets (Du Plessis, 2021). Such resistance is partly due to the fact that many educational managers in South Africa come from Eurocentric backgrounds and, in some cases, are descendants of colonial ancestors (Heleta & Dilraj, 2024). Universities and schools often resist change because of deeply rooted traditions and academic conservatism. In addition, some scholars are either unfamiliar with or reluctant to adopt non-Western epistemologies, while academic gatekeepers frequently fear that decolonising efforts could compromise academic standards or international competitiveness (Wilson, 2022).

Furthermore, the dominance of English as the primary language of instruction in South Africa poses a significant barrier to replacing or supplementing it with indigenous languages. In a study reflecting on three decades of teaching social work in South Africa, Mogorosi and Thabede (2018) observed that enthusiasm for indigenising the discipline remains limited. They nonetheless argued that decolonising and indigenising social work are crucial for conceptualising the field in a culturally relevant and contextually grounded manner.

#### *African policies are rooted in colonial languages*

Colonial powers were deliberate and strategic in formulating policies that shaped the trajectory of education across African countries. Although numerous structural reforms have been introduced since independence, colonial-era policies remain deeply entrenched and continue to exert a hegemonic influence on contemporary educational systems (Wilson, 2022). Despite persistent calls from scholars for education policies that are more inclusive, gender-sensitive, and environmentally responsive, these appeals have yet to gain substantial traction or be widely implemented (Unterhalter, 2019).

#### *Lack of consensus on what decolonisation and indigenisation mean*

There remains no unified understanding of what indigenisation and decolonisation truly entail. For some, it simply means incorporating African content into the curriculum; for others, it demands a complete overhaul of the epistemological foundations. This ambiguity hampers coordinated efforts and the development of coherent policies. It may also explain why the process of indigenising curricula across Africa has progressed at a snail's pace. Despite Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's seminal call to decolonise the minds and, to some extent, school curricula (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 1986), and the concerted efforts of key figures in the late 20th century, such as Prof. Osei Hwedie (1996) and Prof. Roderick Mupedziswa (1997), significant progress remains limited.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The current wave in Africa, where African countries, including South Africa, are engaging in the war against colonialism through decolonisation and indigenisation of educational curricula, is welcome and long overdue. This has been glaringly evident in the process of decolonising and indigenising social work (Mogorosi & Thabede, 2018). Evidently, colonisation has had a strong negative impact on the growth and development of curricula in many African countries, including South Africa, with poverty and glaring inequalities being a serious ramification (Sewpaul et al., 2021). Unfortunately, Western countries have ensured, for centuries, that their erstwhile colonies remain under the West's influence in virtually every aspect of life, including language, epistemologies, and ways of understanding development. The goal of Western countries is to maintain the power dynamics that former Western colonies experience today (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 1986; Escobar, 1995). Sadly, it has taken a long time for Africans to realize that their growth was stunted, as the curriculum they had was purely Western-centric (Mazrui, 1986). This curriculum failed to be developmental because it was not intended for colonized countries, but rather for Western countries. Therefore, a glaring mismatch between former Western colonies has been evident (Kang'ethe, 2014; Osei Hwedie, 1996). The current curriculum can therefore be blamed for perpetuating poverty and other social vices, such as inequalities, amid stringent power dynamics between the elites and the masses

(Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). It was only in the second half of the 20th century that the need for indigenisation was advocated by a few pragmatists, including Professor Osei Hwedie, Roderick Mupedziswa, and, currently, Prof. Simon Murote Kang'ethe (Osei Hwedie, 1996; Mupedziswa, 1995; Kang'ethe, 2014, 2024). This must have followed the clarion call by Prof. Ngugi wa Thiongo for African countries to consider decolonising their minds (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 1986).

Importantly, the role of Prof. Ngugi wa Thiongo's seminal call for African countries to decolonize their minds, if they were to achieve meaningful development, has been hardy (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 1986). This call aligns directly with scholarship on decolonizing education, epistemic liberation, and curriculum transformation—especially in African and postcolonial contexts. This reflects the argument that meaningful decolonization requires grounding education in local knowledge, languages, and lived realities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

Today, the curriculum appears to produce individuals who consider serving in either blue- or white-collar jobs. That was the intention of the colonisers when they promulgated most of the curriculum that drives most educational institutions in Africa (Rodney, 1972). There is, therefore, a need for a curriculum paradigm shift that can be energized, allowing us to invigorate our curricula and address many of the problems that plague our institutions. This is through serious engagement in indigenisation and decolonisation (Osei Hwedie, 1996; Mupedziswa, 1995). However, the road to achieving indigenisation and decolonisation is both dusty and bumpy, and it requires concerted efforts from diverse stakeholders, with the government offering a strong springboard of goodwill.

It is essential that South Africa continue to strengthen the existing rubrics of indigenisation, as seen, for example, at UNISA, which is incrementally indigenising some modules (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2024). Importantly, the number of indigenisation and decolonisation indabas needs to be strengthened and spread across all the institutions in the country. This is the only assurance that the country is going to come up with a curriculum that will address the challenges the country faces

## STUDY LIMITATION

The researcher acknowledges a limitation: the study relied heavily on journal literature on the indigenisation of the curriculum in South Africa, while making limited use of relevant policy documents that could have provided additional insight, such as the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. Furthermore, the study would have been strengthened by the inclusion of more recent publications from the past five years. However, the authors incorporated some older sources that were considered valuable for informing the discourse and debate on the indigenisation of the curriculum within the South African context.

## CONCLUSION

The road to achieving both indigenisation and decolonialisation in South Africa is both dusty and bumpy. While South Africa has seen some pockets of success in indigenisation, it is important to recognise that indigenising the curriculum is not merely about adding African content to existing syllabi. Rather, it is a deliberate and transformative process that reimagines the foundation, structure, and purpose of education on the continent. This process requires, above all, policy and political goodwill, resource allocation, academic innovation, and societal commitment to ensure that South African higher education institutions genuinely transform their curricula to embrace indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies. This researcher is optimistic that South Africa can serve as a benchmark for indigenising the curriculum, with other African countries following suit.

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