# Dismantling Epistemic Violence? Exploring Education Academics Conceptual Understanding of Decolonising the Curriculum in Higher Education

**By**

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Submitted In Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**MASTERS IN EDUCATION**

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

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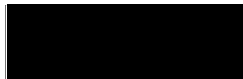
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October 2020

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Date: _6/10/2020_____

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks be to God Almighty for the strength, protection and guidance he gave me to complete this study.

I would like to acknowledge the following people for their contribution in my journey to completing this Master's thesis.

- My sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Mlamuli Nkosingphile Hlatshwayo, for believing in me. Thank you for your guidance, patience and your time, I could not have asked for a more competent and supportive supervisor. The valuable lessons you have taught me have contributed positively to my academic and intellectual growth.
- To my mother, Gloria Khumalo, for encouraging me not to give up when the journey became difficult.
- To my spiritual parents, Pastor Basil and Diane Lawrence, for lifting me up in prayer and reassuring me of the God given plan for my life.
- To my daughter, Peyton Danielle Mac Kenzie, for understanding when mom needed to work and for remaining positive. You are truly my pillar of strength.

# DEDICATION

*I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. Genesis 12:2*

*This study is dedicated to my daughter Peyton Danielle Mackenzie.*

# ABSTRACT

The call to decolonise South African universities is not a new phenomenon. Calls to "decolonise" are not new nor have they gone uncontested whenever they have been made (Mbembe, 2016). The student protests, better known as #RhodesMustfall and #FeesMustfall movements, ignited the call for universities in South Africa to decolonise the curriculum. The call was to dismantle the dominant presence of Eurocentric thought in the curriculum. The implications of such a call to decolonise the curriculum in higher education, implicates the academics who teach the curriculum. The call is for them to reconsider what they teach and how they teach (Grant, Quinn & Vorster, 2018). The rationale for this study was to conceptualise academics understanding of decolonising higher education curriculum and the extent to which they embrace or reject the call to decolonise higher education curriculum in South Africa. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the 8 academics interviewed. The views of Burr's (2015) social constructionism framework provide this study with a rich contextual meaning to the perceptions and attitudes of education academics on decolonising the curriculum in higher education. A case study methodology was used in this study, in a South African higher education institution's School of Education in the KwaZulu-Natal area, where academics from various clusters and disciplines were participants. The targeted higher education institution was selected using purposive sampling. The sample consisted of multiracial, multicultural and bilingual academics who were interviewed using semi structured interviews. The study found that academics' concept of a decolonised curriculum was to dismantle epistemic violence by challenging Eurocentric thought and recentring African epistemologies. Also, the study found that the confusion in defining what decolonisation entails has demotivated academics from heeding the call in their own pedagogical practices because of the misconceptions of what a decolonised curriculum would entail. The study concludes with suggestions for further research and recommendations in order to successfully drive the call for a decolonised and transformed higher education.

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

| NAME | ACRONYM |
| --- | --- |
| Education White Paper 3 A Programme For The Transformation Of Higher Education | Education White Paper 3 |
| The Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions | The Soudien Report |
| University of Cape Town | UCT |
| University of KwaZulu-Natal | UKZN |
| University of Witwatersrand | WITS |

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# CHAPTER ONE

# OVERVIEW, CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

South African higher education is still in the process of transformation (Mbembe, 2016). As the white minority government gained "independence" from colonial powers in 1961, and as the country moved to the democratic dispensation in 1994, "the colonial and apartheid knowledge systems and Eurocentrism have not been sufficiently questioned, let alone transformed" (Heleta, 2018, p. 47). Despite alleged victories, through opening university doors to all, higher education institutions have proven to be vulnerable, following the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests. The #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests of 2015 and 2016 ignited the call for educational institutions to reconsider the structural, pedagogical, and curricula content offerings to decolonise the curriculum. Decolonisation is not a new phenomenon, but, as le Grange (2016) puts it, had arguably not received sufficient attention in South Africa prior to the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protest movements of 2015 and 2016. South Africa's historical past of colonialisation and apartheid left deep wounds that were not adequately treated, hence; the call for redress through decolonising the curriculum in higher education. This chapter begins by discussing the focus and purpose of the study. This is followed by a brief description of the location of the study and a discussion of the background and rationale for conducting this study. A literature review is presented, followed by the objectives, research questions and thereafter, a brief summary of the research methodology. Finally, a chapter overview of the study is provided.

## TITLE

The title of this study is

- Dismantling Epistemic Violence? Exploring Education Academics' Conceptual Understanding of Decolonising the Curriculum in Higher education.

## 1.2 FOCUS AND PURPOSE

The focus of this qualitative case study was on education academics in a higher education institution in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. Higher education curriculum is the focus of the study as student protests called for change in higher education in particular.

The targeted participants were those whose backgrounds were multiracial, multicultural and bilingual, so as to explore, from the diversity of their experiences; the different understandings, beliefs and assumptions they had about the recent calls for South African higher education to decolonise and transform. The main purpose of the study was to explore the extent to which academics at this historically white teachers' college understood, rejected or embraced the call to decolonise the curriculum, informed by their different educational experiences in higher education.

## 1.3 LOCATION OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in a South African higher education institution's School of Education in the KwaZulu- Natal area, where academics from various clusters and disciplines were participants. The context was a historically whites only teachers' college with much diversity in the demographics of students and academics. This school of education has five clusters, which are, Education Studies, Education and Development Studies, Languages and Arts Education, Mathematics and Computer Science Education and Social Science Education.

## 1.4 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The call to decolonise higher education in the 2015 and 2016 student protests exposed the untransformed nature of curriculum (Menon & Castrillon, 2019). The untransformed curriculum in higher education was viewed as perpetuating the marginalisation of students disadvantaged during the apartheid and colonial era. Despite efforts to transform higher education institutions through various policies and reports such as the Education White Paper 3: A Programme For The Transformation of Higher Education (hereafter, Education White Paper 3), the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion, and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (hereafter, the Soudien Report), the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements of 2015 and 2016 proved that higher education had not been transformed. Literature presents diverse views on the decolonisation and transformation of higher education. Despite much effort to explore what decolonisation of university curricula means (see for example, Heleta, 2016; Higgs, 2016; Le Grange, 2016; Luckett, 2016), there has been less theorisation of what decolonisation might imply for higher education pedagogy and praxis (Zembylas, 2018).

As an academic, the rationale for conducting this study was to extend knowledge and literature on decolonising or transforming the curriculum in higher education. I was part of the 2015

student protests where I began to learn about the continued marginalisation of black students in higher education spaces. As a black student, it was during the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests that I began to interrogate my presence in my institution, whose curriculum celebrated Eurocentric historiographies. In 2017, I was afforded an opportunity to travel abroad. I was part of a panel discussion on "Coloniality in the curriculum: the darker side of modernity", which directly addressed curriculum issues prevalent in our education system. This took place at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands, as part of the Nuffic Annual International Conference. My experience at this global conference allowed me space to engage in matters important to transforming our education system. It was at this conference that I began to understand the greater calls to decolonise the curriculum in South Africa.

## 1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2015 and 2016, South African higher education was engulfed with student protests under the banner #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. These student protest movements reawakened an interest in the decolonisation of the university in South Africa, and by association, the decolonisation of the university curriculum (Le Grange, 2016).

South Africa gain independence from colonial rule in 1961 and transitioned to a democratic state in 1994. Despite the elation that came with the declaration of independence or democracy, the cracks in the higher education system began be to exposed 25 years into democracy through the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements. Nyamnjoh (2016) argues that, despite attempts at decolonisation of university education through promotion of perspectives grounded in African realities and experiences, African universities have, almost without exception, significantly Africanised their personnel but not their curricula, pedagogical structures, or epistemologies in a systematic and productive manner. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) and Heleta (2016) remind us that Africanisation and decolonisation of the universities in the 1960s and 1970s was superficial, and included changing the names of universities, appointing black chancellors and vice-chancellors, and increasing the number of black academics and black students. According to Heleta (2016), South African students in 2015 and a small number of progressive academics began a campaign in 2015 to decolonise the curriculum at universities by ending the domination of Western epistemological traditions, histories and figures. Pather (2015) notes that the conversation to decolonise the curriculum is an important conversation, and long overdue; given that the Western model of academic organisation on which the South African university is based, remains largely unchallenged. In order to drive a decolonisation

agenda, Le Grange (2016) notes that it is important to have a mutual understanding of what it means to decolonise the curriculum. Therefore, academics who select readings and teach the content ought to be radical in transforming their pedagogical practices because they are implicated in the calls for a decolonised curriculum.

The Literature on decolonising the curriculum in South African higher education has been based, mainly on students' demands and how higher education managers responded to the demands through either ignoring the call or calling on law enforcement. There is a gap in literature on the voices of higher education academics and their understanding of decolonising the curriculum in higher education, yet they are the ones who deal with students on a daily basis. If we want to decolonise, we must first focus on the classroom, who teaches, what they teach, how they teach, and how they relate to the students (Msibi, 2016). This study is significant in that it explores the education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising the curriculum in higher education.

## 1.6 OBJECTIVES
The objectives guiding this study were as follows:

- To explore Education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising curriculum in South African higher education.
- To explore to what extent Education academics understand the call for decolonising of higher education curriculum.
- To explore to what extent, Education academics support or reject the demands for decolonising curriculum in South African higher education.

## 1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The research questions that framed the study were:

- What are Education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising curriculum in South African higher education?
- To what extent, do Education academics understand the call for decolonising curriculum in South African higher education?
- To what extent, do Education academics support or reject the demands for decolonising curriculum in South African higher education?

## 1.8 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative case study and uses the interpretivist paradigm. The way in which the data is generated is through semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling was used to yield a sample of 8 education academics from different disciplines/races/gender backgrounds. Using thematic analysis, data from the semi-structured interviews was analysed. In this chapter, a short discussion is presented on the limitations of the study.

## 1.9 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

### Chapter 1

The first chapter of this study provided an introduction to the research paper by providing a general overview of the rationale for the study and a description of the context in which the research took place. The research objectives and research questions were also highlighted, as was what the researcher hopes to achieve out of the research study.

### Chapter 2

In this chapter, I review literature on the broader calls for South African higher education transformation and decolonisation, and emerging literature on higher education as a field. The literature outlines the manner in which South African higher education has been affected by the logic and history of apartheid and colonialism. Thereafter, a discussion on transformation in higher education in a post-apartheid South Africa is provided. The section then maps the student protest of 2015 and 2016 in South African higher education institutions.

### Chapter 3

This chapter focuses on the data generation process followed in this study. It is divided into three sections in which I discuss the philosophical underpinnings of the study by describing qualitative research and the interpretivist paradigm. Then the methodology and methods used to generate data are discussed and the last section explains how the study addressed ethical issues.

### Chapter 4

In this chapter, I discuss social constructionism as a theoretical framework framing this study. This section gives a detailed explanation of the concepts that make up social constructionism as a theoretical framework. The concepts are discussed using Viviane Burr's views on social constructionism as a social process, historical and specificity of knowledge, and language as a precondition for thought.

**Chapter 5**

In this chapter, I present the findings of the study and how I analysed the data. This is chapter one of two that focuses on presenting and theorising the data. In this chapter, I provide a thematic analysis of data which allowed for the "data to speak for itself". This is done by presenting themes that emerged through the semi-structured interviews where transcripts were read several times and using in-text comments to highlight experiences, opinions and challenges of the participants.

**Chapter 6**

In chapter 5, I discuss the thematic analysis used to analyse the data. In this chapter, I theorise the findings of the study in an attempting at making (theoretical) sense of the findings. This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the theoretical framework and the literature on the phenomena studied.

## 1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided the reader with an overview of the study. This chapter outlined the title, focus, research objectives and research questions. A brief outline of the location of the study was provided and the rationale for conducting the study. In order find the gaps in literature on the phenomenon studied, this chapter provided a brief literature review and ended off with a discussion on the research methodology used in the study.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I outlined the focus and purpose of the study, followed by a brief description on the location of the study and the background and rationale for conducting this study. A literature review was presented followed by the objectives, research questions, and brief summary of the research methodology, and a chapter overview of the study. In this chapter, I discuss the broader calls for South African higher education transformation and decolonisation, and the emerging literature on higher education as a field. I begin by firstly outlining the manner in which South African higher education has been affected by the logic and history of apartheid. I then move to discussing transformation in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa. Lastly, I map the student protest of 2015 and 2016 in South African higher education institutions.

## 2.1 SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: FRAGMENTATION AND DIFFERENTIATION

In order to make sense of the current events taking place in South African higher education institutions, we ought to return to the historical events that contributed to the challenges facing the higher education system. Colonisation and Apartheid in South Africa were systems designed to exclude, marginalise and subordinate black people, and maintain the dominance of white people. However, struggles of transformation in education are not struggles that are exclusive to the South African context.

According to Nwonka (2020), the radical and militant voices of black people worldwide continue in the form of fragmented anti-racist and decolonisation work. Furthermore, Nwonka (2020) notes that 1960-70s was historical, where student movements in the United Kingdom like #whyismycurriculumwhite, #whyisntmyprofessorblack and #rhodesmustfall introduced black liberation politics that had not been witnessed in British Universities in decades. Students at University College London launched a Campaign, #whyismycurriculumwhite, taking aim at a Eurocentric curriculum that ignored the experiences of black people and concealed the influence of colonialism and slavery. In March 2014, students at Harvard University in the United States launched the #iTooAmHarvard multimedia campaign, designed to solidify the experiences of racially marginalised students. The project went viral and inspired similar

campaigns at elite, predominantly white institutions across North America and the UK, like Oxford and Cambridge. In America, the #BlackLivesMatter movement started as a result of police brutality and the unequal justice system on black people (Dixon & Dundes, 2020). In 2020, the #BlackLivesMatter movement once again gained momentum worldwide following the brutal killing of George Floyd, a black man, by a white police officer (Dixon & Dundes, 2020). Students used the #BlackLivesMatter movement to protest across educational institutions in America, calling for an anti-racist curriculum and demanding that schools and higher education institutions rewrite their curriculum to rid it of systemic racism and slavery. Furthermore, these students said they felt neglected by the unconsciously biased teachers, by racist policies, and by a Eurocentric curriculum. They felt that the curriculum should represent all students. Similarly, in Hong Kong, higher education institutions are still grappling with issues of transformation from British imperialism. Law (2017) asserts that despite the end of the colonial era for Hong Kong in 1997, the status of English in higher education has been enhanced, where higher education institutions including the Hong Kong University and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology resisted changing their language policy and continued with English as the only or major medium of instruction in spite of acknowledging students' difficulty in learning in a second language. These are some of the struggles of transformation in higher education where students are calling for the education system to be more inclusive.

Bringing the discussion back to the South African context, and drawing on the work of Bourdieu, Naidoo (2004) notes that higher education is a powerful contributor to the maintenance and reproduction of social inequalities. Naidoo (2004) classifies the history of higher education in South Africa in three tiers thus;

> The dominant tier consisted of white English-medium universities that were set up in the colonial era for the British community. In 1959, under apartheid laws, these institutions were designated exclusively for white students. These universities were research intensive, internationally recognized and offered high-status postgraduate programmes. In the intermediate tier were the Afrikaans-medium universities, also designated white, which were set up by the Afrikaans community during the Anglo-Boer war. Universities that were set up for the different groups of black South Africans were in the subordinate tier (Naidoo, 2004, p 6)

The role of universities was part of the colonial project to promote white supremacy and develop the white youth to maintain and further expand colonial society (Pietsch, 2016). The way in which the curriculum was constituted based on Eurocentric ideals was a political decision. Bain (2003) writes that the colonisers believed they had a 'paternal duty that obliged self-proclaimed agents of civilisation to seek the good of the disadvantaged.' They saw themselves as providers of supervision and guidance to the 'weak' and 'childlike' people in the colonies (Mamdani, 1997). These universities were the dominant tier universities that were, and to some extent still are, dominant in terms of research, resources, and attracting the crème de la crème students (Naidoo, 2004). Universities in this tier may have benefited from funding from Britain which meant no political interference from the South African government. Without political influence from the South African government, these universities were not restricted by internal political laws that could pose a threat to their agenda of Eurocentric dominance. During apartheid, these universities were a threat to the Afrikaans society who needed to conserve the laws of apartheid. It is against this background that the intermediate tier universities were set up.

According to Davies (1996), the historically white Afrikaans medium universities were famous for the apartheid political project and contributing to the reproduction of apartheid culture. Heleta (2016) notes that the Afrikaans-medium universities worked closely with the government by contributing to the systematic under-qualification of the majority black population, while English-medium universities also played a role in maintaining the segregation and oppression of the black population. A number of colonial universities were established as bilingual institutions; both English and Afrikaans. That started to change in 1918 when some institutions were transformed into Afrikaans-medium universities due to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the demand for Afrikaans-only higher education (Du Plessis, 2006). The Afrikaans universities were established to extend the logic of apartheid. Noting that they could not compete with the dominate tier universities; they needed to create their own elites, government officials, scholars in order to promote Afrikaans nationalism. Bantustan universities, established in the former homelands in the 1970s, were located in remote rural places to drive a perverse system of national, racialised and separate development for universities reserved for blacks (see for example, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017).

Historically black universities, as well as universities in the homelands, were established and/or maintained to train black people to serve, first the colony and then the apartheid state (Mudimbe, 1985). During apartheid, the funding for black education was extremely low and this was paralleled with reduced participation by the majority of the African population, who were only being schooled for low-skilled jobs (Brown 2006). The function of these universities was deliberate for retaining black students in the position of subordination and marginalisation. As in the case of the white institutions, governance systems at black universities 'tended to be highly authoritarian' and dominated by white Afrikaners who had graduated from Afrikaans-medium universities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Furthermore, the intellectual and academic agendas of the black universities 'were set by their apartheid origins' and driven mainly by white academics (Bunting, 2006). Excluding black academics in academia was a form of educational exclusion and oppression which led to poor knowledge production. Education was utilised as a tool of oppression to keep the blacks in a position of subordination. Reddy (2004) observes that;

> The ideological underpinning of the apartheid education policy was specifically designed to fit in with the broader apartheid social arrangements – that is, distributing educational resources unequally on the basis of "race", teaching black students that their marginality and oppressed position in South African society was "natural", and in the process, imbuing in them an ethnic "tribal" identity and locating them with "their own" people (Reddy, 2004, p. 4).

Politics played a profound role on how these historical universities were established. Separating what is taught to black students and what is taught to white students along the lines of race and class was part of a political agenda to reinforce white supremacy and black marginality. These universities, deeply rooted in colonial and apartheid agendas, posed a challenge to the transformation of South African higher education in post-apartheid South African democracy. Hlatshawyo and Fomunyam (2019, p. 5) argue that,

> The role of the higher education landscape under apartheid was to ensure that different ethnic groups were divided according to their "tribal" identities, and the social construction of the subaltern would serve the interests of the Bantustan as well as the broader state functioning goals of the regime. This resulted in the unintended consequences of creating the conditions of possibility that led to the emergence of student movements that acted as a force of resistance, particularly in historically black universities.

This was a brief history of South African higher education in the 1990s on debates related to transforming institutions of higher learning, with special emphasis being placed on curricula. I now turn to exploring these debates.

## 2.2 DEBATES ON TRANSFORMATION

When South Africa became a democratic country in 1994, there was great expectation on the changes the newly elected political leaders would make during this transition. "Questions were raised about the success of post- apartheid projects and the capacity to deal with basic human entitlements of dignity, safety, shelter and the right to adequate health and education" (Soudien, 2011, p. 5). There was undoubtedly need to restore dignity and equality to the oppressed, denied them by the dreadful systems of colonisation and apartheid. Jansen (1999) argues that the Minister of Education failed to translate political freedoms into strategic opportunities for educational transformation. The way in which the minister of education failed to transform higher education during the transition to democracy led to inability to dismantle knowledge systems and physical features of colonisation and apartheid that served as a reminder of an immoral education system of exclusion for black South Africans. Acknowledging inequalities in higher education, the Education White paper 3's (1997) vision was of a transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system of higher education. In line with the transformation agenda some of the recommendations of the Education White Paper 3 (1997) were that:

> The review of higher education institutions will entail an assessment of the broad curriculum in higher education in terms of content, relevance, design and delivery. Through the vision of restructuring and diversification, acknowledged the need to widen access and diversify the curriculum. To promote the development of institutional cultures which will embody values and facilitate behaviour aimed at peaceful assembly, reconciliation, respect for difference and the promotion of the common good.

Badat (2010) suggests that the South African Constitution of 1996, as well as the Education White Paper 3, directed the state and higher education institutions on prioritisation of higher education and development. These legislative instruments served as guidelines to redress the injustices of colonialism and apartheid in society and in higher education institutions. The author notes that the social purposes for the transformation agenda resonates with the core roles

of higher education, of dismantling violent epistemologies and producing critical graduates who are actively involved in the production and application of knowledge through research, thereby contributing to the economy, social development and democracy. Badat (2017) further submits that locating higher education within the broader context of political democracy, economic reform and redistributive social policies aimed at equity through Education White Paper 3, emphasises a 'thick' belief of the responsiveness of higher education's societal purpose (Badat, 2010). This speaks to the belief that higher education institutions are key players in the broader society's transformation agenda, tasked with an ethical obligation to redress the injustices of the past through progressive transformation. The objective of transforming higher education requires the mapping out of key issues to align with the transformation and democratisation of higher education.

Five aspects of transformation were identified in post-apartheid South Africa. These included "democratising the governance structures of institutions, increasing access for educationally and financially disadvantaged students, restructuring the curriculum, focusing on developmental needs in research and community service and redressing inequalities in terms of race and gender" (Fourie, 1999, pg. 1). Despite the presence of a the Educational White Paper 3 that addresses transformation, the commission on transforming institutions has sparked varying philosophies of an ideal transformed higher education. Heleta (2016) notes that, while all universities have had new policies and frameworks that speak about equality, equity, transformation and change; institutional cultures and epistemological traditions have not considerably changed. Jansen (1999) blames the politics of reconciliation, advocated by President Nelson Mandela through informal arrangements, which weakened radical decision-making in education. Pinar (2010) argues that social difference in terms of race, class, gender and others, as opposed to pedagogical reform, was the driving force for change in education in South Africa and Southern Africa. After being declared a democratic country in 1994, South African universities opened access into historically white universities for black students, to address race and class inequalities through massification. Merely identifying areas that need transformation and opening university doors to all is not sufficient for the transformation agenda. Monitoring transformation against the five key issues identified is equally necessary. The absence of monitoring or evaluating curriculum and curriculum transformation is the gap in the system.

In 2008, a commission was launched to look into issues of discrimination in higher education. The triggering point was what was termed Ritz fall. It was an occurrence at the Ritz hostel in the University of the Free State, where a group of four white students urinated in a drink and made black workers drink the substance. In addition to that, they made these black workers do inhumane and humiliating acts as part of a competition for their amusement. This incident raised questions of how students who had no experience of apartheid perpetuated racial exploits. After the commission, a report was released showing that almost all universities in South Africa were not transformed.  Issues of racism and sexism where pervasive across all universities. The question that needs to be asked is, what is the role of the university? Is it the responsibility of the university to deal with deeply held racist views among its students? The commission reported that there was a disjuncture in terms of policy and practices caused by; poor dissemination of information pertaining to policy, and disjuncture between institutional culture and transformation policies.

In congruence with both the Education White Paper 3 on  higher education and the report of the Ministerial Committee of the 2008 commission on Progress towards Transformation, Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions, Badat (2010) argues that,

> The tasks are to uproot historical cultural traditions and practices that impede the development of more open, vibrant, democratic and inclusive intellectual and institutional cultures, to respect, affirm and embrace the rich diversity of the people that today constitute and must increasingly constitute historically white universities, and to purposefully create and institutionalize cultures that embrace difference and diversity, and sees these as strengths and powerful wellsprings for personal, intellectual and institutional development (Badat, 2010, p. 32).

 Higher education institutions have a great task at hand to create a learning space that is inclusive; through the curriculum, pedagogical practices and institutional culture. Marrow (2009) discusses epistemological access on curriculum transformation in higher education and notes that,

> Curricula, especially but not only in the social sciences, are bridges between past and future. And any traditional curriculum will be in some measure, a celebration of the work of what are currently understood as the heroines and heroes in the relevant field. Opponents of a curriculum are likely to say it is little more than the storehouse of dead texts, or of the work of dead white males-such as Emile Durkheim or Max Weber

whose power is to thereby extend beyond their graves (Morrow, 2009, p. 30).

This implies that in the curriculum, there are founding philosophers who dominate the field, and their work is used as foundational knowledge in a particular discipline. Despite the fact that knowledge is evolving as people socially construct new knowledge, these philosophers' power/ legacy still communicates beyond the grave. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) finds it disturbing that, despite the fact that African intellectuals have produced numerous books and journal articles speaking directly on pertinent issues of epistemic freedom and development, these works have not succeeded in replacing those of Western theorists such as Michael Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Max Weber and Karl Marx, even within African academies.

This speaks to the debates on curriculum transformation where some are calling for the dismantling of traditional curriculum at the level of knowledge. The opponents of a Tylerian curriculum style are looking for curriculum transformation in terms of our knowledge source which remains as the Global North. This explains why South African university students have been calling for a decolonised transformed higher education curriculum. Furthermore, curricula are seen as more than just the content but as multifaceted, encompassing elements of power. Students feel that the curriculum is alienating and makes them fail to recognise who they are. In other words, they cannot locate themselves in the curriculum, and this is particularly true for Black students.

The demand for higher education increased through massification or increased access at historically white and historically Afrikaans institutions, which resulted in larger proportions of students coming from educationally and financially deprived backgrounds (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). However, Badat (2010) highlights the reality of the connection of race and class and argues that equity of access for students (largely black) from working class and impoverished rural social backgrounds will continue to be harshly compromised unless there is a greater commitment among students flocking into universities. The academic attainment by previously disadvantaged students was a disaster waiting to happen. Transformation in higher education or lack thereof, reached a boiling point in 2015. I now move more closely to the 2015-2016 students' movements which made curriculum transformation and decolonisation a central call for their demands.

**2.3 THE 2015-2016 STUDENT MOVEMENTS**

It should be noted that often when the 2015-2016 student movements are referred to, there is an assumption that they are a recent phenomenon in South African higher education (see for example, Heleta, 2016, 2018; Mbembe, 2015). This often constitutes a fundamental misrecognition as historically black universities have been protesting around issues of housing/student accommodation, food, campus safety, infrastructure and others for a long time. Pimblott (2020) argues that the call to decolonise the university is not new, and has roots in a number of earlier social and cultural movements whose participants shared in a determination to confront the ideological apparatus of white supremacy and colonialism, as well as develop alternative epistemologies and approaches to learning and knowledge production. 'Motivated by the still visible signs of colonialism and lack of transformation at the historically white University of Cape Town (UCT), on 9 March 2015 black student Chumani Maxwell scooped human faeces from a portable flush toilet in the township of Khayelitsha and smeared it on the statue of British colonialist Cecil Rhodes' (Murris, 2016. Pg. 1). Without warning, UCT's endeavour to be a leading African world-class research-intensive university came under scrutiny, with the start of a critical examination of their position as a public institution of higher education in a country two decades post-apartheid ( Pather , 2015).

According to Murris (2016), the shadow of apartheid and deep institutionalised culture founded on racism and sexism was unbearably humiliating for Chumani Maxwele to have to walk past a statue glorifying someone now regarded as a racist. Years after democracy and policies to transform higher education through initiatives such as the Educational White Paper 3 of 1997 and the Ministerial Committee of the 2008 commission, transformation of higher education was still of a superficial nature. The movement known as #RhodesMustFall began, accompanied by protest action that later witnessed victory with the removal of the large statue of Cecil Rhodes from UCT a month after the campaign began. The main focus in this first phase of student protests was against the colonial character and content of the old, long established universities, and general failure of transformation with evident indicators such as small number of black professors in former white institutions (Jansen, 2017). According to Pillay (2016), by late 2015 and early 2016, the student protests at many institutions shifted their focus to tuition fee increases, student debt, financial aid, and the desire for free higher education. This led to the #FeesMustFall student movement.

The #FeesMustFall student movement began as a protest against the fee increase in Universities. Dismelo (2015) argues that the #FeesMustFall and its origins were ignited by the need for access to opportunities that improved the lives of majority black students. The belief is that gaining access in higher education leads to a better life, and a good education is the key to success. #FeesMustFall movement started in Johannesburg at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) in 2016. According to Pillay (2016), Wits claimed that the subsidy of 5% from government would not be enough to accommodate the net increase in costs by the university; for library books, journal subscriptions, research equipment, and staff salaries. Furthermore, Pillay (2016) reveals that Rhodes University in Grahamstown then announced a minimum initial payment of 50% of fees for 2016; meaning that the average student living in residence needed an upfront payment of R45 000. The #FeesMustFall movement was a protest against financial exclusion and debt traps for economically disadvantaged students. Asking students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who represented the majority of black students, to pay R45 000 was a subtle tactic of exclusion. Moloi, Makgoba and Miruka (2017) rightfully argue that the issue of fees was strongly linked to the calls for decolonising education since students pointed to the continued racialised inequalities between the rich and the poor in South Africa. There is an interconnectedness of the struggles of the previously disadvantaged students in higher education in terms of exclusion. The previously disadvantaged students have to navigate their way through institutional culture, alienation curriculum that does not account for their lived experiences as well as financial conditions.

## 2.4 DEBATES ON INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE VERSE EPISTEMIC ACCESS

The student protest of 2015 and 2016 is an important reawakening of issues faced in higher education prior to 2015 (Le Grange, 2016). Heleta (2016) notes that South African students and a small number of progressive academics began a campaign in 2015 to decolonise the curriculum at universities and ending the domination of Western epistemological traditions, histories and figures. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017), despite efforts to embrace the work by African academics in the curriculum, the structural framework of Eurocentric epistemology remains. Pather (2015) argues that the conversation to decolonise the curriculum is an important and long overdue conversation, given that the Western model of academic organisation on which the South African university is biased, remains largely unchallenged. In order to drive a decolonisation agenda, the students driving the move to decolonise higher education were very vocal about their demands.

Students across universities in South Africa expressed their views about the #RhodesMustFall movement. Luckett (2016) found that protesters calling for the #RhodesMustFall movement comprised mostly black students, staff and workers. It was a call for the incomplete transformation of higher education institutions, decolonisation of institutional culture, and that of the curriculum. Through the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements, there was consensus on the need to decolonise the curriculum in universities. Black students' experiences of alienation were due to course content at university, because what is taught did not fit into what they learn at home. For instance, Ngcobozi (2015) categorises this feeling of institutional alienation and marginality as "whiteness" in as far as it attempts to recenter white ontologies in institutions of higher learning, against black pain and its subjectivity.

> Micro-aggression, or what I call "palatable forms of racism", are as rancid as those who have the blood of our foremothers and fathers on their hands. The campaign was to bring to the fore the intersections of micro- and macro-aggression faced by black students on an institutional level, but also in their interactions with other students on campus. We must dispel the myth that palatable racism is not an assault or visceral crushing of black humanity. Although not surprising, a majority of those who felt offended by the campaign have adopted a politics of erasure and silencing, which, if not derailing the legitimate experiences and lived realities faced by black students at Rhodes University, have also been used as a tool to balance the debate. This "balancing" of the debate demands black students to dislocate themselves from the structural violence imposed by whiteness, white imperialism, capitalism and white supremacy, and locate themselves in the lived oppression of white students at Rhodes University (Ngcobozi, 2015.

Furthermore, Langa (2017, p.18) discussed a general view of students in a discussion on decolonisation of the curriculum at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), and posited that, 'their curricula fails to reflect the realities of what is happening in many African communities and the curricula design teaches students how to be professionals in a European world'. Maringira and Gukurume (2017) also note that the central idea amongst students was a shift from studying Western knowledge to a focus on knowledge that is indigenous and represents the lived experiences of students. During a discussion on decolonisation of the curriculum at the University of Witwatersrand and University of Cape Town (UCT), the idea of changing the curriculum was to include the African experience by changing the university culture, which remains white and alienating to black students and academics (Langa, 2017).

#RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements gained publicity with media publishing the discontent of students manifest in the burning of buildings, cars and violent protest. The ways in which management in higher education conceptualised the call for decolonising higher education is important in achieving a decolonised curriculum and free education. In order to achieve a decolonised university curriculum and free higher education students, there is need for support of university management, academics and the state. Langa (2017) however, found that the common response by the university management in all the case studies was to get court interdicts against the protesting students. Law enforcement was used to silence the voices of the oppressed and marginalised. These actions resemble the 1976 protest action against Afrikaans as a medium of instructions for black students'. Black students have been fighting a long time for a liberated education. The continuation of the protest to a point where it turned violent was a result of many university managers not willing to negotiate with students. The issue of decolonising the curriculum was a just call by students who wanted their education to reflect their lived experiences. The growing trend has been that students want to learn more about themselves and acknowledge their identities through education. What these movements brought back to the surface is an envisioning of the transformed education system.

At the heart of curriculum is the selection of knowledge to which students are exposed. Such knowledge has largely been Eurocentric, thus attributing truth only to a Western way of knowledge production (Grant, Quinn &Vorster, 2018). The silencing of other forms of knowledge is equally problematic as the majority of students in South African universities are from the African continent. The reason for this bias towards Eurocentric knowledge is that, many black academics have themselves been schooled in Eurocentric traditions and find it difficult to think beyond their firmly entrenched disciplinary identities and rule (Heleta, 2016). For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017), Decolonisation is about epistemic justice as an essential prerequisite for social justice, a process of learning to unlearn in order to relearn. This calls on African intellectuals and academics to openly acknowledge their factory faults and 'miseducation'. In order for African intellectuals and academics to unlearn and relearn, Pinar (2012) provides a method of 'currere', which asks one to autobiographically account for how they came to acquire knowledge. According to Pinar (2012, p. 36), 'In doing so one regresses into the past, to capture it as it was as it hovers over the present, like the past the future inhabits the present.' Pinar speaks to how we have come to acquire knowledge, and calls on individuals to go back into the past and critically analyse the source of their knowledge. The individual imagines the future and the consequences of holding onto the kinds of knowledge they have

acquired. They then have to reimagine the consequences in the future. While imagining the future, they have to look into the present and analyse how the present is influenced by the past, and how it can affect the future. In the context of South African higher education, the present moment calls for the dismantling of Eurocentric knowledge (see for example, Mbembe 2015).Finally, the last stage in 'currere' method is the decision to change.

Although the curriculum has become an epicentre for transformation  by the Education White paper 3 and the Ministerial Committee of the 2008 commission agendas, there has been little interrogation or enquiry into the meanings of transformation and how it manifests in the very curricula (Menon, & Castrillon, 2019). The theory of curriculum has, over the last two decades, been understood as autobiographical approaches, inter-disciplinary knowledge, and complicated conversations (Pinar, 2010).  For Ramrathan (2016), the field of curriculum studies has expanded significantly beyond instrumental discipline-based curriculum development (adding and removing of modules as and when needed) to ideas of human liberation, intellectual awareness, social justice and epistemological and ontological innovations located in indigenous knowledge systems. The shift in understanding curriculum to address the psychological and sociological needs of students is a just shift, where curriculum accounts for intersectionality, social justice, rehumanising, and so on. As the understanding of curriculum is evolving, education academics who deal with curriculum decisions have a moral obligation to disrupt taken for granted knowledge in the curriculum, as well as hegemonic structures that favour a knowledge from a particular region or from a particular group of people. According to Mahabeer (2018), some curriculum decision-makers perpetuate Western ways of thinking about the curriculum, others make a shift in their thinking towards a 're-humanising' approach to the curriculum. The decision-makers are catalytic agents who are neither complacent nor at the mercy of Western knowledge and ideologies. This implies that the education academics have the agency to interrogate what they teach, how they teach it, and why they teach what they teach.

## 2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the literature on decolonising and transforming of the curriculum in South African higher education. There has been a gap in literature on the voices of higher education academics and their understanding of decolonising the curriculum in higher education, yet they deal with students on a daily basis. This research study explored academics conceptual understanding of decolonising the curriculum in higher education as the call of the

time calls on academics to think progressively through their pedagogical practices. In the following chapter, I focus on the research methodology and the data generation decisions that were made in the study.

# CHAPTER THREE
# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.0 INTRODUCTION

In this study, I explored academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising the curriculum in higher education. This chapter focuses on the data generation process followed in this study. It is divided into three sections. I firstly explore the philosophical underpinnings of this study by discussing qualitative research and interpretivist paradigm. Secondly, I present the methodology and methods used to generate data. Finally, I explain how the study addressed ethical issues and the study's limitations.

## 3.1 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In research, methodologies are plans and procedures for research from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis, which involve the intersection of philosophical assumptions, designs, and specific methods (Creswell, 2014). A similar definition of research methodology is understood as:

> A way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. In it we study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them. It is necessary for the researcher to know not only the research methods/techniques but also the methodology (Kothari, 2015, p. 4).

Research methodology was important in this study to provide understanding of the phenomena in order to answer the research questions. In literature, the terms methodology and method are used interchangeably in some texts whereas others use them as having different meanings (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). In defining methodology and methods, Somekh and Lewin (2005) say methodology is the overall approach to research associated to the paradigm or theoretical framework while the method refers to systematic modes, procedures or tools used for collection and analysis of data. For Bertram and Christiansen (2012), a research method is the approach that the researcher used to gather data as well as how the data was analysed. Thus, research methodology can be considered as the overall strategy to achieve the aim and objectives of the research, and research methods are merely tools (Sutrisna, 2009). This study adopts the definition given by Somekh and Lewin's (2005). The research methodology that was used is a qualitative interpretivist approach, using a case study methodology. The research

method used to collect data was the semi-structured interview, and the data was analysed using thematic data analysis. According to Sutrisna (2009), with research methodology, there are three major dimensions that need to be considered, namely; the philosophical underpinning of the study, reasoning of the research, and data.

I now turn to discussing the philosophical underpinning and context, as well as the methods of generating data that were used.

## 3.2 PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNING AND CONTEXT

Discussing the philosophical differences between quantitative and qualitative research on the onset is vital to guide the chosen paradigm and research methods of the study. The philosophical stance of the research study strongly influences the reasoning of the research and both will influence the data required by the research and analysis of the data (Sutrisna, 2009). Quantitative research belongs with objectivist, positivist, or post-positivist paradigms whereas qualitative research belongs with subjectivist, constructivist, critical, postmodern, feminist, interpretivist, and other associated paradigms (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Mackenzie and Knipe 2006; Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, and Collins 2009). While quantitative research relies largely on numerical data, qualitative research relies on data derived from human interpretations. The study drew on a qualitative research approach which Bertram and Christiansen (2014) suggests is the verbal, textual or visual data that cannot be counted. In quantitative research emphasis is on counting numbers and less on how people think or behave (Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem. Creswell (2003) makes the argument that,

> Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants' setting; analysing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible writing structure (Creswell, 2013, p.28).

Qualitative research enables researchers to explore human behaviour, understand how they make meaning and how they solve problems. In addition, Flick (2014) suggests that a qualitative research design helps researchers understand their participants' cultural and social interactions in their living space, for example, how academics socially construct meaning in

their context. In doing so, a researcher can explore a phenomenon or situation in participants' natural setting by collecting participants' stories and retelling them in order to address the research question. Creswell and Creswell (2017) note that qualitative research often begins with:

> assumptions and use of interpretive or theoretical frameworks that inform the study of the research problems addressing the meanings individuals or groups of individuals ascribe to a social or human problem and involves the generation of data in natural settings which is sensitive to the people and places under study and whose data is analysed deductively using patterns or themes in the voice of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 44).

The primary aim of qualitative research is to gain a better understanding of phenomenon through the experiences of those who have directly experienced the phenomenon, recognising the value of participants' unique viewpoints that can only be fully understood within the context of their experience and worldview (Castleberry& Nolen, 2018). Qualitative research approach allowed for the understanding of education academics to the phenomenon of decolonising the curriculum. According to Hammarberg, Kirkman and de Lacey (2016), qualitative research is generally not hypothesis driven nor neutral, as the researchers puts themselves in the position of the participants to understand their world from their perspective. Similarly, Creswell (2013) notes that with qualitative research, researchers use literature in a manner that is consistent with the assumptions of learning from the participants and not for seeing the answers from the researchers' viewpoint. In other words, the researcher does not engage with the study with preconceived outcomes but allows the participants to generate the data through verbal, textual or visual data. Examples of qualitative data can include interview transcripts, newspaper articles, questionnaire responses, diaries, videos, images, or field observations (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Kothari, 2015). Using a qualitative research approach in this study allows for an in-depth understanding of how the education academics interpret their experiences and how their experiences influence their behaviour and worldview. McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) argues that data derived from specific participants is narrowed down to their viewpoints and experiences. Using the qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study to capture participants' viewpoints on the phenomenon. To fully understand the phenomenon of this study, education academics were involved as they were directly in the context of the phenomenon studied.

The next section will discuss the philosophical underpinnings of this study in order to demonstrate coherence between the research methodology and the underpinnings and assumptions informing this study.

## 3.3 PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS – INTERPRETIVIST PARADIGM, EPISTEMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY

This section addresses the philosophical assumptions in this study. The philosophical perspectives in this study helped determine the methodology, methods of collecting data as well as how the data analysis procedures. Krauss (2005) argues that epistemology is related to ontology and methodology. While ontology involves the philosophy of reality, epistemology addresses how we construct knowledge. According to Mackenzie & Knipe (2006), it is the choice of paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research. Without suggesting a paradigm as the first step, there is no foundation for successive choices regarding methodology, methods, and literature or research design. Qualitative research approach entails the assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm, the grounds of which lie in the perception of meaning of social action in the context of life world and from the actors' perspectives (Vasiochis de Gialdino, 2009). Using interpretivist paradigm was effective in this study as the objective was to understand the perceptions of education academics on the phenomenon of decolonising the curriculum in higher education. The interpretivist paradigm is related to qualitative research, where the focus is on how participants construct knowledge, their interpretations, and how behaviours are formed in their social context.

Understanding the research paradigm and the underpinning epistemological and ontological assumptions is important as it provides a framework for thinking about, and conducting research in a rigorous and systematic way (Bertram and Christensen, 2014). Research paradigms represents a particular worldview that defines the nature of the world, the individuals' place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher aims to understand the meaning that informs human behaviour (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). Interpretivist are therefore, interested in the understandings of those that are in context, and how they understand their world. For this study, I used the interpretivist approach as it enabled a deep, subjective analysis of the experiences of the participants. Subjective meanings and perceptions of the participants are critical in qualitative research, and it is the researcher's responsibility to access these (Krefting, 1991). This study used an interpretivist lens to analyse the data, therefore the epistemological and ontological underpinning are founded on multiple realties. According to

Krauss (2005), qualitative research is based on the realistic constructivist ontology that suggests that there is no objective reality, but multiple realties constructed by human beings who experience a phenomenon of interest.

## 3.4 RESEARCH METHODS

### CASE STUDIES

Yin (2011, p.18) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." Case studies are often used by researchers in the interpretivist paradigm and use qualitative data (Bertram and Christensen, 2014). Case study is essentially an intensive investigation of a particular unit under consideration. The objective of the case study method is to locate the factors that account for the behaviour-patterns of the given unit as an integrated totality (Kothari, 2015).Using a case study for this study was appropriate as the research employed a qualitative research approach through an interpretivist paradigm lens.

According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when; the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions, you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study, you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study, or the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. These questions are linked to understanding human perceptions and the meanings attributed to their perceptions.  According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011), case studies aim to describe what it is like to be in a particular situation, where the researcher is able to capture the reality of the participants' lived experiences. I have chosen to use a case study because of its realistic character in studying participants in their natural setting rather than in isolated artificial space.

Case study methodology can be categorised as multiple case studies or single case study (Stake, 2013). A multiple case study allows the researcher to analyse, within each setting and across settings, several cases to understand the similarities and differences between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This implies that in multiple case studies, the researcher explores phenomenon in more than one area. For example, to explore education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising curriculum in South African higher education using all higher education

institutions as the cases studied. In a single case study, the researcher chooses one area as a case. This study is about a single higher education institution within the context of the KwaZulu-Natal province. A single case study was used to explore the phenomenon in this study.

Case studies can also be categorised in terms of being intrinsic and instrumental (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014). Stake (1995) uses the term intrinsic and suggests that researchers who have a genuine interest in the case should use this approach when the intent is to better understand the case, while Baxter and Jack (2008) argue that these case studies are done when a case is interesting. Intrinsic case study research is often fit for the purpose of evaluation research because it can be about assigning worth to a particular set of activities and experiences (Cousin, 2005). In contrast to intrinsic case studies, instrumental case studies are undertaken to examine a particular case in order to gain insight into an issue or theory (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher explores this, not to invoke an intrest on the topic, but to gain insight and to formulate a theory. This study explored education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising the curriculum in higher education in their social context. Using an instrumental case study was appropriate because the aim of the study was to gain insight or perhaps form a theory on the perceptions and attitudes of the academics in relation to the phenomenon. Additionally, instrumental cases do not rely on apriori hypotheses to develop intrinsic themes. Rather, case study themes can emerge during the course of data collection and analysis in a continual process of interpreting and reinterpreting data (Gilsrap, 2009). I now turn to discuss semi-structured interviews and how they were used to generate data.

## 3.5 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The emphasis placed on qualitative research is on process and meaning where the techniques used in qualitative studies include in-depth interviews, focus group interviews and participant observations (Alhojailan, 2012). For the purpose of this study, in-depth interviews were used to generate the data. The interviews of the eight participants were conducted at the school of education in the participants' offices. The durations of the interviews were approximately one hour to two hours per participant. According to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), qualitative methods of generating data in an interpretivist paradigm make use of interviews. A research interview is a conversation between the researcher and the participant where the researcher is the person who sets the agenda and asks the questions (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014). Interviews, generally informal in nature, serve to clarify the meanings participants ascribe to a

given situation, whilst helping the researcher see situations through the eyes of the participants (Sherman and Webb, 2004).

Interviews are usually face to face with the researcher (interviewer) and participant (interviewee). Given (2008) asserts that it is critical for the interviewer to suspend assumptions about how people will answer the questions. When the interviews were conducted, I was mindful of suspending my own assumptions in how the participants would respond, and I guarded against directing the interview in a particular direction. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) note that in structured interviews, the researcher uses an interview schedule, which is a set of questions in a predetermined order. This study made use of semi-structured interviews where the researcher used an interview schedule so that the participants' responses would drive the interview, not the researcher.

The semi-structured interview is designed to establish personal responses from participants regarding a phenomenon or particular situation experienced, where participants are at liberty to answer questions as they desire (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Kajornboon (2005) states that the researcher can prompt and probe deeper into a given situation using semi-structured interviews, depending on the direction the interview takes. In this research study, semi-structured interviews gave me an opportunity to explore education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising the curriculum in higher education.

## 3.6 PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

In this study, I opted to use purposive sampling to select participants. A sample design in research is a fixed plan determined before data is actually collected by obtaining a sample of a given population where the idea is to pick out the sample in relation to criterion which are considered important for the particular study (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). The case, as mentioned earlier, was a higher educational institution in KwaZulu-Natal which was purposively selected as it is directly linked to the context and phenomenon explored. While noting the link of all universities to the decolonisation phenomenon, I purposively selected this educational institution based on convenience where I was able to have easy access to the participants. According to Mason (2006), 'purposive sampling strategies are non-random ways of ensuring that particular categories of cases within a sampling universe are represented in the final sample of a project' (Mason, 2006, p. 5). The purposive sample comprised 8 education academics from different disciplines/race/gender backgrounds.

The rationale for employing purposive sampling is that certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question, and their presence in the sample should be ensured (Mason 2006). Based on these understanding of purposive sampling, I chose to purposively select 8 educational academics from a selected higher education institution in the KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. The rationale for selecting academics of different disciplines/race/gender/sex was to gain an understanding of how these differences influenced their understanding, behaviour and interpretation of their own context. Using purposive sampling to select participants in this study was effective as these participants were my former lecturers. I approached participants with the knowledge of who they are and the discipline they came from. Therefore, I did not struggle to find the participants or need participants to refer me to other participants.

## 3.7 DATA ANALYSES

Data analysis is an ongoing process during research. Data analysis involves analysing participant information through steps such as organising the data, preparing the data, reading through the information, coding the data, developing a description from the codes, and thematic analysis ( Creswell, 2014). This study used thematic analysis to analyse the data. According to

Braun, Clarke, Hayfield and Terry (2019), thematic analysis is systematically identifying, organising and providing insight into patterns of meaning emerging across the data. Organising the data into patterns or themes helped make sense of the collection of the shared interpretations by the participants. According to Joffe (2012), the kind of research questions thematic analysis is best suited to, are questions that elucidate the specific nature of conceptualisation of the phenomenon under study. Using thematic analysis was therefore, suitable for exploring educations conceptual understanding of the phenomenon in this study, as the study sought to understand perceptions.

Thematic analysis is rooted in the much older tradition of content analysis (Joffe, 2012). According to Smith (2000), thematic analysis shares many of the principles and procedures of content analysis that date back to the early 20th century within the social sciences, but further back in the humanities. Content analysis is indigenous to communication research, and is potentially one of the most important research techniques on social sciences as it seeks to analyse data  within a specific context through meanings someone, groups attributes to them (Krippendorff, 2018). Joffe (2012) notes that content analysis involves formulating  categories and then counting the number of instances in which they are used in a text  by determining  the

frequency of the occurrence of particular categories. This implies that content analysis relies on counting attributes in data, for example particular words. Silverman (1993), as cited in Joffe and Yardley (2004), found that content analysis has been judged as 'trite' by relying solely on the frequency outcomes it generates, and is also accused of removing codes from their context, thereby stripping data of its meaning. Therefore, I opted for thematic analysis to analyse the data. For Merton (1975), thematic analysis was developed, in part, to go beyond observable material to more implicit themes and thematic structures. Thematic analysis is capable of detecting and identifying, for example, factors that influence any issue generated by the participant. Therefore, the participants' interpretations are significant in terms of giving the most appropriate explanations for their behaviours, actions and thoughts (Alhojailan, 2012). The term thematic discourse analysis is used to refer to a wide range of pattern-type analysis of data, ranging from thematic analysis within a social constructionist epistemology, where patterns are identified as socially produced (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015).

The way in which the research was categorised was by using inductive and deductive methods to analyse the data. Bertram and Christensen (2014) are of the view that inductive methods to analyse the data begin with the raw data collected, where the researcher begins to detect patterns and regularities in the data to formulate some tentative hypotheses or meaning. This implies that using an inductive approach enables the researcher to categorise codes and themes after the data is collected. Deductive approach to analysing the data is whereby the researcher brings to the data, a series of concepts, ideas or topics that then can be used to code and interpret data.

In this study, I employed both an inductive and deductive approach to data generation. In other words, an inductive approach enabled the "data to speak for itself" and allowed the themes to emerge on their own as they emanated from the research participants through thematic analysis. The deductive approach enabled me to make sense of the data through the adoption of social constructionism as a theoretical lens in the study. The graphical representation below shows the stages of data analysis that I adopted.
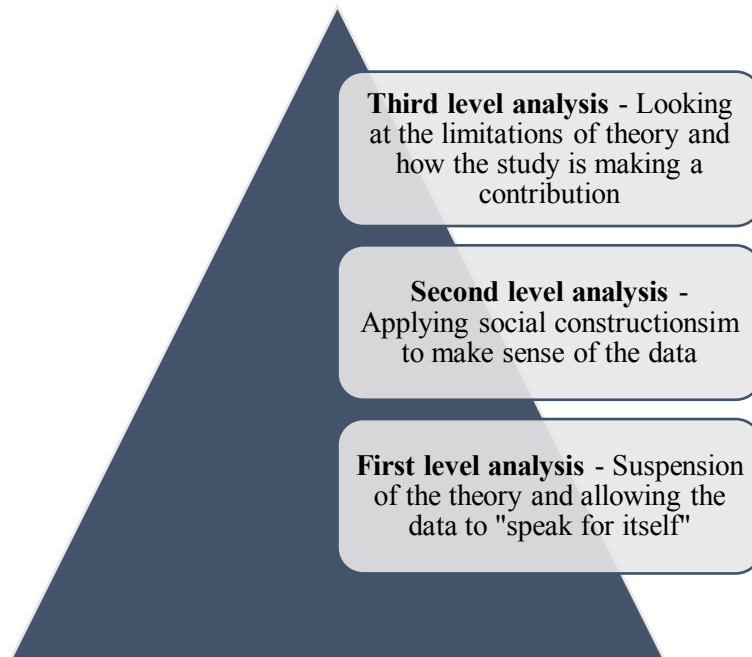
**Table 3.1: Graphical representation of the dialectical analysis of the data in my study**

In thematic analysis, raw data forms codes, and codes form themes and thematic maps thereafter identifying and defining these themes leads to interpretations (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The first level analysis was done where the raw data was used to form codes by using Microsoft word document prior to organising the data collected from the semi structured interviews into themes. After the data had been collected, I turned to the task of analysing them. The analysis of data requires a number of closely related operations such as establishment of categories and the application of these categories to raw data through coding (Kothari, 2015). The data from the semi structured interviews was typed into Microsoft word using Google word type, where I read out the exact words of the participants, and this was typed into Microsoft word document. Doing so enabled me to appreciate the full picture and make connections between participants' ideas. In order to allow the data to 'speak for itself', the data was read several times prior to identifying themes, codes and analysing the data, which allowed for more time to evaluate the data and prevent precipitous conclusions. Once data had been reassembled through coding, the researcher was then able to extract quotes from the data and view them in relation to each other (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Extracting quotes from the data allowed the interpretation of data across varied experiences, and understandings of the academics in the study, and the identification of thematic patterns across the data. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) note that themes capture the essence of a phenomenon under investigation in relation to the research question or purpose of the study. Once the data was read several

times, themes started to emerge using the raw data from the interviews. The second level involved using the themes that emerged from the raw data to discuss the findings in order to make sense of the data using theoretical framework underpinning the study, which is social constructionism. The third level of analysis involved finding the limitations of the theory in relation to the data from the semi-structured interviews as well as from literature. Finally, the third level of analysis involved exploring the contribution this study made in stretching the selected theory further.

| Participants | Race | Gender | Qualification | Discipline |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sipho | Black | Male | M.ED | Curriculum studies |
| Celine | Indian | Female | PhD | Social Science History |
| Paul | Black | Male | PhD | Education leadership |
| Gloria | Black | Female | PhD | Curriculum studies |
| Ntokozo | Black | Female | PhD | Curriculum studies |
| Mbali | Black | Female | PhD | Curriculum studies |
| Bongani | Black | Male | PhD | Curriculum studies |
| Moses | Black | Male | PhD | Science and Technology |

**Table 3.2: Table representing the participants who took part in the study**

The table above presents the academics who participated in this study. This table aims to give a description of the faculty structure from which the participants were selected. This school of education has five faculties, which are, Education Studies, Education and Development Studies, Languages and Arts Education, Mathematics and Computer Science Education and Social Science Education. Academics from Curriculum studies fall under the faculty of education studies. Those from Science and technology fall under the Mathematics and Computer Science Education and the participant from Education leadership is from Education and Development Studies.

## 3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness in a research study considers the consistency of the data, that is, whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same or similar context (Krefting, 1991). In qualitative research, instead of validity and reliability, trustworthiness, which includes dependability and credibility, is used; where the researcher has to ensure that the findings of the study are actual findings, and not the impression of the researcher (Bricki and Green 2007, (Given, 2008). This study used qualitative research to ensure trustworthiness of the study where dependability and credibility was considered.

According to Given (2008), dependability is equivalent to reliability in quantitative research. Shenton (2004) further notes that in order to ensure dependability of the study, the research design must be viewed as a "prototype model". Shenton (2004) argues that in-depth coverage also allows the reader to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed. The results should be consistently linked to data, and findings should be an accurate expression of the meanings intended by the participants. The dependability of the study was enhanced by using an audit trail where the data generation and analysis process were made transparent, and the researcher looked for possible bias or distortion, while acknowledging that bias cannot be completely erased in a qualitative research (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). During the interview process, I ensured that I checked for clarity with participants to accurately understand their views. Using semi-structured interviews was helpful in probing the participants to articulate clearly their perceptions on the phenomenon explored.

In terms of ensuring that the study is credible, member checking was done with the participants. Member checks are widely utilised in qualitative research for seeking participant insight on research findings as they are assessed as the standard for establishing trustworthiness (Kornbluh, 2015). Member checking is done to cause a shift from the researcher to the participant in the study with the intention of establishing credibility. Member checking requires the participants to verify the accuracy of the data collected by the researcher. Carlson (2010) notes that member checking means taking the data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information, specifically with semi-structured interviews. One of the ways this is done is by having a focus group with the

participants. Alternatively, Given (2008) suggests that researchers may have participants view the raw data or transcriptions and ask participants if the themes or categories are a representation of their responses. In doing so, the researcher is able to determine if they have developed sufficient evidence and if the overall evidence is realistic and accurate. Participants may also be asked to read any transcripts of dialogues in which they have participated. Here, the emphasis is on whether the participants consider that their words match what they actually intended, since, if a tape recorder has been used, the articulations themselves should at least have been accurately captured (Sheton, 2004). In this study, the data collected from the participants was made available to them to check accuracy of their responses. Furthermore, the use of a tape recorder ensured the accuracy of data captured from the participants.

## 3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study adhered to the ethical principles of research. According to Bertram and Christensen (2014), the researcher must respect the autonomy of the participants in the research. Written consent was obtained from the participants with assurance of the right of withdrawal from the study at any time. [1] Participants were given clear explanation of the study to ensure they make an informed decision to participate in the study. Furthermore, participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and they should have no expectation of receiving payment for their participation. All information that the study participants shared in this study remained confidential, except to the supervisor and researcher. Pseudonyms were used to replace the participants' and the higher education institution's names. Gatekeeping[2] and ethical clearance[3] was considered where permission to contact participants and conduct the study was sought from the higher education registrar.

## 3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitation of the study was that I could not get academics who were multiracial as suggested in my sample discussion. Based on the availability of academics, I interviewed academics who were willing to be interviewed. During the process of selecting and approaching academics, I faced some resistance where some academics felt the decolonisation conversation was for the younger academics and not for them, and thus refused to participant in the study. These academics are part of the older generation, who have been at the university

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[1] Please see Annexure A For ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
[2] Please see annexure B For gatekeeper permission.
[3] Please see Annexure C For the consent letters.

for many years. I make mention of this because their resistance to take part in the study because of the idea that decolonisation is for younger academics would have provided a different perspective allowing for rich data on their perceptions on decolonisation. These academics would have pushed the conversation further by providing their perception on how they may have been directly affected by apartheid and colonisation. This study was limited by time constraints, which did not permit follow-up interviews to explore any questions that might have emerged during data analysis due to availability of academics.

**3.11 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I outlined the methodological positioning of the study. I firstly discussed the philosophical underpinnings used in this study by discussing qualitative research and interpretivist paradigm. Secondly, I presented the methodology and methods used to generate data. This study used semi-structured interviews and analysis the data by using thematic analysis. Finally, I provided a discussion on how the study addressed trustworthiness, ethical issues and the study's limitations. In the following chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework, that is, social constructionism, and how it was applied in theorising the findings.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I discussed the research methodology and research methods used in this study. In this chapter, I discuss social constructionism as a theoretical framework for this study. This section of the study gives a detailed explanation of the use of theoretical framework in this study. Theoretical frameworks help us move beyond merely describing a phenomenon to understanding, critiquing and offering new lens that allow us to see and explain taken-for-granted aspects of a phenomenon (MacLeod, Cameron, Kits &Tummons, 2019). According to Jabreen (2006), a theory that frames a study is made up of concepts which collectively develop into a theory.

## 4.1 THE EARLY PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

The philosophical foundations of social constructionism can be traced back to the field of Sociology and Psychology, both of which were dominated by positivism and empiricism. Positivism is about scientific facts dependent on the trends of scientific discourse and are produced and confirmed by shared agreement within a scientific community (Hruby, 2001). Within the scientific community, shared agreement and scientific findings/ research strengthen philosophical foundations of positivism. Most scientists understand reality from a positivist paradigm and believe that there is a real, material world, independent of people; and that it is possible to discover the world through systematic measurement such as telescopes microscopes and mathematical formulas (Gergen & Gergen, 2014). This implies that positivism relies on scientific affirmation of theories through experiments and statistics, to uncover the nature of how society operates. Empiricism is a view that suggests that the only valid knowledge is that which is derived from observation and experiment. Both positivism and empiricism rely on science to validate truth and knowledge. However, the field of Sociology and Psychology began to evolve during postmodernism. According to Burr (2015), postmodernism is a rejection of the idea that there can be an ultimate truth and that the world that we see is the result of hidden structures. This suggests that we come to know the world through discovery. With the emergence of postmodernism social constructionism theory came about. Social constructionism originated as an attempt to explore the nature of reality, and has been

associated with the post-modern era in qualitative research (Andrews, 2012). It denies that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality. Instead, as a culture or society, we construct versions of reality between us (Burr, 2015). What we come to know is through shared agreement in our interactions with others.

Humans give objects that exists in real life their meaning. For example, a tree exists before humans give it meaning, but it is referred to as a tree because humans have a shared understanding and agreement that it is indeed a tree. Social constructionism theory implies that everything we consider real is socially constructed. Elsewhere, Gergen and Gergen (2014) notes that social constructionists do not say, "There is nothing," or "There is no reality but whenever people define what "reality" is, they are always speaking from a cultural tradition. This speaks to how our realities are shaped through our interaction with others within our social context. Cunliffe (2008) suggests that social constructionism is based on the idea that social reality is not separate from us, but is intimately interwoven with us as each shapes and is shaped by the other.

Social constructionism is a theoretical movement that brings an alternative philosophical assumption regarding reality construction and knowledge production, and is concerned with the ways in which knowledge is historically situated and embedded in cultural values and practices (Galbin, 2014). Social constructionism is closely linked to social constructivism. According to Young and Colin (2004), constructivism proposes that each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes while social constructionism has a social rather than an individual focus. Both social constructivism and social constructionism deal with how a phenomenon is developed. However, the difference is that social constructivism deals with an individual's meaning of knowledge within a social context, whereas social constructionism deals with phenomena in relation to a social context (Gergen and Gergen, 2014).

The focus of this study is not on the academics' cognitive processes that accompany knowledge, but on how social factors shape interpretations. In this study, the use of social constructionism as a theoretical framework is appropriate as the phenomenon seeks to explore academics' conceptual understandings of decolonising the curriculum in South African higher education. In the following sections, I discuss the key concepts that give rise to social constructionism as a theoretical framework. In doing so, I draw on Burr (2015) who outlines six concepts of social constructionism theory, namely; anti essentialism, questioning realism,

historical and cultural specificity of knowledge, language as a precondition for thought, focus on interaction and social practices, and focus on process.

## 4.2 ANTI-ESSENTIALISM

Social constructionism is a theoretical approach that offers an alternative to the positivist view of the nature of reality, founded on essentialism. According to Burr (2015), essentialism is the view that objects or people have an essential inherent nature that is discovered. This is a belief that people have an underlying and unchanging essence. Essentialism categorises people within fixed identities by putting them into groups. Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst (2000) shed light on essentialist beliefs about social categories, and argue that they are deeply rooted in biological underpinnings, are historically fixed, culturally universal, and their boundaries are sharp and not susceptible to sociocultural shaping. The idea that people can categorise others based on their common essence or inherent nature can bring up serious problems for societies. For example, how society essentialises issues of race.

> Race is regarded as a common sense and used as a discriminating agency, it comes out as racial essentialism. One of the discriminating ways is to focus on the origin or race as the common essence or nature. In other words, racial essentialism can be regarded as a belief based on a common genetic or biological essence. That essence defines, determines and encompasses all members of a racial category. If essentialism is applied to racial identity, racial categories occur with distinct, specific, fixed and stable cultural values, beliefs, practices, and lifestyles (Sahin, 2018, p. 7).

Going back to the literature review section of this study, the historical segregation of universities in the colonial and apartheid era was set up using racial essentialism, where race determined the quality of education one received. The segregation of these universities was based on a perverted common sense ideology where, white skin complexion and straight hair was seen as superior and worthy of a better education than a black skin complexion with coiled hair. For black South Africans, their biological essence or common genetics was used as a discriminatory weapon to justify a watered down Bantu education.

Issues of power emanate from an essentialist thought which are fixed ideas about a group of people, which foster stereotypes and discrimination. As a point of reference, colonisation on the Africa continent resulted in the dominance of Western culture and the subordination of indigenous culture and indigenous knowledge systems. This reference

has shaped ideas that western intellectual thought and culture is superior to indigenous knowledge and culture. According to Williams (1991), one should refrain from adopting the essentialist notion of race, or one stable category of difference but should describe difference in ways that avoid stereotypes. To begin with, we must fully understand that race is not a biological concept, but a social and historical construct (Grillo, 1995). Arguments against essentialism suggest that one cannot look at a single or fixed idea about people because the way we categorise them is a social construct. Therefore, it is debatable if people have an inherent nature as essentialists believe, without humans' social constructing them.

Anti-essentialists have argued that people are not creatures of determinism, natural or cultural, but are socially constructed and constructing (Sayer, 1997). Anti-essentialism is against the notion that if we essentialise something, we make permanent links. For example, if we say men are more prone to aggressive behaviour than women are, we use the biological make-up of men to argue our case. Social constructionism is against presenting things as facts by not making essentialist statements that solidify truth as facts. Furthermore, anti-essentialists question notions of realism, which is a concept that states that there is a reality that exists that needs to be discovered. Social constructionists question if there is knowledge out there that is waiting to be discovered.

## 4.3 QUESTIONING REALIST ASSUMPTIONS

Realism is a concept about reality that exists out there waiting to be discovered. According to Burr (2015), realism is an ontological theory which states that the external world exists independently of being thought of or perceived. Social constructionism denies that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality. Instead, as a culture or society, we construct versions of reality between us. Andrews (2012) presents this distinction between realism and relativism thus;

> Realism and relativism represent two polarised perspectives on a continuum between objective reality at one end and multiple realities on the other. Both positions are problematic for qualitative research. Adopting a realist position ignores the way the researcher constructs interpretations of the findings and assumes that what is reported is a true and faithful interpretation of a knowable and independent reality. Relativism leads to the conclusion that nothing can ever be known for definite, that there are multiple realities, none having precedence over

the other in terms of claims to represent the truth about social phenomena (Andrews, 2012, p. 9).

Social constructionists adopt a relativist position, where there is no such thing as one truth. However, Burr (2015) argues that most relativists do not deny the possibility of a real world existing independently of our talk about it, and realists acknowledge the power of language to construct the world in some respect. Baghramian (2015) asserts that social constructionism has relativistic consequences insofar as it claims that different social forces lead to the construction of different "worlds" and that there is no neutral ground for adjudicating between them. For example, the social construction of the education academics in this study brings about multifaceted realities where the reality of one academic may not necessarily be the reality of another in the same social context. Relativists argue that even if such reality exists, it is inaccessible to us. The only things we have access to, are our various representations of the world, and these cannot be judged against reality for their truthfulness and accuracy (Reed, 2008). According to Niiniluoto (1991), if a theory is reliable in tests or agrees sufficiently closely with observations, a realist regards this as a good reason for tentatively claiming that the objectives have been achieved or at least to some extent achieved.

Chalmers (2009) asserts, an ontological existence declaration has an objective truth-value if its truth-value does not depend on a context of utterance or a context of assessment: that is, if every ontological utterance of the same sentence has the same truth-value, and if the truth-value of these utterances do not vary with different ontological contexts of assessment. This suggests that there is an ultimate truth and this truth is sustained when there is no variation in its findings or when the context has changed. If a hypothesis is tested multiple times or in a different context with the same result, realists regard this as truth-value. Relativist are against these assumptions and argue that there are multiple realities and that there is no ultimate truth.

> Scientific realism expands the scope of what science can claim as real beyond that, which can be or had been observed by proposing a deep ontology of the world. It thus distinguishes between the real (the ontological level of structures and causal mechanisms), the actual (that which occurs in the world and is potentially open to observation), and the empirical (that which is observed and brought within scientific knowledge as fact (Reed, 2008, p. 4).

Scientific realism places emphasis on objective knowledge as value truth. According to Galbin (2014), social constructionism argues that true objectivity is absent in the human sciences

because all methods require one set of subjective humans to rate another set of subjective humans, so, "the tool for knowing" is inevitably subjective people themselves. People socially and actively negotiate knowledge. Reed (2008) further maintains that anti-realism holds that no unproblematic ontological existence declaration has an objective, determinate, and nontrivial truth-value. Language is a concept that social constructionists regard as a medium through which people socially construct and negotiate realities.

## 4.4 LANGUAGE AS A PRECONDITION FOR THOUGHT AND AS A FORM OF SOCIAL ACTION

Language as a precondition for thought is an important concept for social constructionism. This implies that how we think is influenced by the language we speak and language is socially constructed. According to Burr (2015), each person acquires concepts and categories as they develop the use of language. These concepts and categories are reproduced everyday by everyone who shares a culture and a language.

> Language is characterized by intersecting ideologies, times, ways of speaking and so on, in which 'the word enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others and all this may crucially shape (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 8 ).

Language as a form of social action entails that words and expressions ensure a common understanding. Relationships inform behaviour because language carries culture between members in a particular community. Social constructionism theory represents a movement towards redefining psychological constructs such as the "mind," "self," and "emotion" as socially constructed processes that are not intrinsic to the individual, but are produced by social discourse (Galbin, 2014).

From a social constructionist perspective, language is more than just a way of connecting people. People 'exist' in language where the focus is not on the individual person but the social interaction, in which language is generated, sustained, and abandoned (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). According to Cunliffe (2008), the intersubjective and dialogical nature of experience suggests that we are always in relation to others and meaning emerges within the dialectical relationship of speakers, listeners and language. Berger and Luckman

(1999) state that people socially construct reality by their use of agreed and shared meanings communicated through language. Furthermore, language is understood by Burr (2015) as a form of social action where words and expressions ensure a common understanding. For example, if a judge has to say 'I sentence you to six years in prison', an action follows whereby the accused goes to jail. This implies that there is a relationship between language and our actions because language carries a culture, meaning and interpretation through shared understanding by members of a particular community.

## 4.5 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF KNOWLEDGE

Social constructionists uphold the belief that the way we understand the world is a product of a historical and cultural process of interaction. Social realities and identities are created and maintained in conversations with others rather than in structures, where the notion that social reality, identities, knowledge, are culturally, socially, historically and linguistically influenced (Cunliffe, 2008). The terms in which the world is understood are social artefacts, products of historically situated exchanges among people. From a constructionist position, the process of understanding is therefore, not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is a result of active cooperative initiative of people in a relationship (Gergen, 1985). This implies that knowledge is historically and culturally constructed where you cannot essentialise or understand it from a realist perspective. We cannot say something is real because what is real for one historical context may not be for another. Consequently, historical specificity of knowledge is about how each knowledge generation is influenced by that generation. As a point of reference, Mahabeer (2018) notes that in recent years, there has been much attention on decolonising universities and decolonising the curriculum, without clear steps outlining a concrete way forward. This suggests that knowledge of past generations about decolonisation is different to the understanding that this generation holds of decolonisation or how they deal with issues of decolonisation. Therefore, knowledge evolves as members of a social group construct meanings and interpretations and as they interact with each other. Cultural specificity of knowledge from a social constructionist view emphasises the role culture plays in producing specific knowledge dependent on the social context. Gergen (1999) claims that in numerous instances, the criteria invoked to identify 'behaviours', 'events' or 'entities', are largely circumscribed by culture, history and social context. Behaviours are located in culture, and language locates meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social context.

**4.6 A FOCUS ON INTERACTION AND SOCIAL PRACTICE**

Social constructionism theory focuses on how knowledge creation, meaning making and interpretations of reality shape human social interactions with each other through social practices. According to Galbin (2014), where people and groups interacting together in a social system form over time, concepts or mental representations of each other's actions eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other.

Berger and Luckmann (1999) argue that sociology of knowledge is observable in terms of what is 'taken for granted as knowledge' by which 'any' body of knowledge comes to be socially established as reality. This implies that there is no objective knowledge as knowledge is multifaceted and negotiated between members of a particular group in a particular context. For example, mainstream psychology looks for explanations of a social phenomenon inside the person by hypothesising the existence of attitudes, motivations and so on. Social constructionists challenge this by looking at how the person's attitudes and motivations are constructions that emerged through interactions with others (Burr, 2015). In the context of this study where the focus is higher education, issues of decolonisation and transformation are at the forefront of debates in literature. We cannot look at how higher education is a problem but how members within higher education socially construct practices that contribute to the problems faced in higher education.

**4.7 A FOCUS ON PROCESS**

Social constructionism covers a range of views from acknowledging how social factors shape interpretations to how the social world is constructed by social processes and relational practices (Young & Collin, 2004). This implies that social constructionist regards knowledge as a process and in order to make it function, is a process of which people are actively involved. According to Burr (2015), the aim of social enquiry disregards questions about the nature of people or society, and focuses on how phenomena or forms of knowledge are achieved by people in interaction. Knowledge is therefore, seen as a process whereby people create and perform knowledge together.

In my study, I relied on social constructionism as a theoretical lenses to explore Education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising curriculum in a South African higher education institution. This study explored multiple realities upon which social constructionism

is founded on. The theory provided theoretical lens in which to understand academics' realities, interpretations and behaviours within in their social context.

## 4.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I first began by mapping the early philosophical development of social constructionism. I then discussed the concepts that make up the social constructionism as the theoretical framework underpinning this study using the views of Burr (2015). The first concept discussed was anti essentialism and essentialism, followed by a discussion on language as a precondition for thought. I then moved on to discuss how history and culture produce a specific kind of knowledge. Finally, the chapter ended with an overview of social constructionism and its focus on interaction and social practice. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS

## 5.0 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present the findings of the study by way of the procedures described in the previous chapter as well as how the data was analysed. This is chapter one of two that present and theorise the data. In this chapter, I provide a thematic analysis, which allowed for the "data to speak for itself". This was done by reading the transcripts several times and using in text comments to highlight experiences, opinions and challenges of the participants. These experiences, opinions and challenges were then grouped into themes using inductive and deductive data analysis. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), inductive data analysis is when the researcher looks for topics or categories in the data, codes themes and then looks for patterns in the categories. The themes I present in this chapter where informed by three research questions that framed the study, that is: What are academics conceptual understanding of decolonising curriculum in South Africa's higher education? To what extent, do Education academics understand the call for decolonising curriculum in South African higher education? And to what extent, do academics embrace or reject the calls for decolonising of South African higher education curriculum. In this chapter, we are suspending the theory and presenting findings as they come out from the participants. Therefore, the seven themes as they emerge from the findings will be discussed in this chapter. In the second analyse chapter six (theorising the finding) is where I begin to draw on the theoretical tools to make sense of the data.

- The table below highlights the themes that emerged from the data analysis process.

| *Emergent Themes* |
| --- |
| Decolonisation as responding to Eurocentric thought |
| Decolonisation as a political agenda |
| Decolonisation, as a language |
| Decolonisation as identity |
| Decolonisation as confusion |
| Higher education curriculum is alienating for students |
| Internationalisation challenges for decolonisation |

I now turn to exploring the themes and discussing them in detail.


## 5.1 THEME 1: DECOLONISATION AS RESPONDING TO EUROCENTRIC THOUGHT

The first theme is presented as an understanding that decolonisation is a response to Eurocentric thought. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) argues that Eurocentric modernity through colonialism and imperialism led European colonialists to question the very humanity of African people. As a result, Eurocentric education became propagated as the only valid and legitimate form of socialisation and of humanity across space and time. According to Le Grange (2016), since inception, all South African universities adopted Western models of academic organisation, which largely excluded and decimated the knowledges of colonised people. Heleta (2016) argues that South Africa must tackle and dismantle the epistemic violence and hegemony of Eurocentrism, completely rethink, reframe and reconstruct the curriculum and place South Africa at the centre of teaching, learning and research. The findings in this study suggest that decolonising the curriculum in higher education would require dismantling dominant Eurocentric epistemologies by acknowledging African epistemologies. In so doing, it would require us to engage in a process of unlearning Eurocentric worldviews which were imposed on Africa through colonisation and imperialism. Some of the participants conceptualised decolonisation as a rethinking or a redirecting of worldviews that include the African perspective and stated that;

> *I would say that it is understanding that there's this conflict between Eurocentric historiographies and African historiographies and at some point we need to find a balance. So, decolonisation is not entirely about doing away with the Eurocentric thinking. It's more about complementing each other so finding out as an African person firstly who you are as an Africa person and what makes you African. You do actually have agency and you don't have to abide or be imprisoned by the hegemonic epistemic challenges that we faced as Africans (Celine-Interview 2)*

> *Decolonisation is just decolonisation which is Africa. We we've been taught or made to understand that we do not have anything to contribute to the world's knowledge, we don't have any form of systematic learning that existed before, hence; there is nothing to harness from that so we were then given Eurocentric kind of way of thinking. So now for me, it's just the reclaiming back of what Africa has*

*to offer in terms of knowledge systems that worked for thousands of years (Ntokozo-interview)*

> *So to speak, decolonising we look at it from the perspective of being African but for me, the way I look at it from this perspective, we cannot only push the things are the white person. Let us also look at our own things but with that said, the Western should inform what is already available and then we can like kind of like reconcile (Mbali-interview)*

In the above extracts, participants expressed the need to acknowledge the African perspective, which requires a challenging of violent epistemologies through reclaiming the knowledge that existed in Africa before colonisation. What was common in participants' conceptual understanding of the call to decolonise the curriculum in higher education was the idea that we need to remove or at least challenge Eurocentric thinking and begin to foreground and recentre African ways of thinking, being and knowing (see le Grange, 2016; Heleta, 2016). There was a strong emphasis by participants that we cannot completely erase Eurocentric thought from our curriculum but to appreciate the contribution of Eurocentric ideals.

I now move on to my second theme on the idea that decolonisation stems from a political agenda.

## 5.2 THEME 2: DECOLONISATION AS A POLITICAL AGENDA

The second theme perceives decolonisation to be a political buzz that would soon die out. Politics plays a profound role in the call to decolonise the curriculum in higher education because colonisation was founded on a political agenda (Jansen, 1999). African historiographies were excluded from the pool of knowledge. This exposes the dominant power relations that favoured Eurocentric historiographies thus, making colonisation political. The findings highlight issues of power where those advocating decolonisation are motivated by the desire to make a name for themselves. The participants linked decolonisation to politics by stating that:

> *I still believe that it is a political issue that those who find comfort in being relevant at the time are putting themselves in it. I think some people have got space to get into what is current at the time for research productivity and all that, and for me that should not be what decolonisation should be. (Paul-interview)*

*Decolonising the curriculum has been taking place before it became the buzzword. Certain things become popular in terms of academic positions it tends to have people who own it and they become the mothers and fathers of that and then you tend to say that is not my thing. So it becomes very territorial so if now I go and present something of decolonisation, people will ask what are speaking about the decolonisation it's very territorial in academia.* (Ntokozo-interview)

*I think it's just academics. Sometimes, you know as producers of knowledge, sometimes they just added because it's a wave. So, you have this wave in universities that becomes a dominant discourse at that particular time so people get carried away with it and they publish and they do this and that, and then it gets finish and you don't know where it went to. So, I don't know where it started. Maybe it's a white person.....I don't know (Mbali-interview)*

*You see the culture of subjects here is not considered and also the identities of people whom the curriculum is being decolonised for is not considered, for me then it is not the decolonisation at all, but it is a political position that people take in order to gain power and then control whosoever is on the opposite side (Bongani-interview)*

Evident from participants' responses is the link of decolonisation to a political wave. There is a noted resistance to immerse themselves in the call to decolonise the curriculum in higher education, given that they perceive the call as a passing wave. Furthermore, there is a reluctance to engage in the call for decolonising higher education because of the view that there are academics who are strong advocates, so these participants do not see the importance of their engagements. Ntokozo and Paul mention that it becomes very territorial as academics are owning decolonisation. In other words, for them, they begin to see what could be regarded as "colonisation" in the calls for decolonisation in higher education.

The next theme I will discuss is decolonisation as language.

## 5.3 THEME 3: DECOLONISATION AS LANGUAGE

The third theme identified is decolonisation as language. Language was identified as part of the call to decolonise or transform higher education curriculum. According Mkhize, and Ndimande-Hlongwa (2014), historically, higher education in South Africa and Africa has relied on foreign languages, and that reliance has become a basis for social discrimination and inequality. Similarly, Beukes (2014) argues that the radical political, social and economic transformation of post apartheid's higher education environment is

now characterised by the domination of English and the continued marginalisation of the (official) indigenous languages. Despite gaining independence from colonialism, the colonial language of English continues to dominate the political, economic and social arenas as the dominant language.

According to Kai Horsthemke, citing Wiredu (2007), Africans need to be clear about their own traditional thought, which has to be recovered by removing several layers of foreign, imposed conceptualisation. They must try to think through their own language again, to formulate and test their own theorising in their own languages. The spaces where African people can potentially test these theorises and foreground their languages is in education spaces. However, the literature on the transformation of higher education in particular, in terms of the language policies favouring the colonial and apartheid languages, has arguably, not been sufficient. Beukes (2014) argues that prejudice and confusion about the role and potential of Africa's indigenous languages to act as suitable languages of instruction persist and have resulted in these languages being viewed as barriers to successful learning. They are therefore, relegated to the back seat with the former colonial languages primarily being the preferred languages of instruction. The confusion comes into play when we try to transform a curriculum or language policies in institutions that are rooted in white supremacy and founded on removing the experiences and languages of black people. How then can we expect a gradual easing and acceptance of the experiences of black people in the curriculum, or their languages to have an equal status to that of the colonial and apartheid languages without resistance? According to Kaya and Seleti, 2014), the continuation of western formal education perpetuates the neo-colonial mentality by building aspirations of modern urban life. Western formal education encourages the youth to believe that they have no future in rural communities as indigenous knowledge including African indigenous languages are obsolete and incapable of preparing them to meet the challenges of the modern world of science and technology (Kaya & Seleti, 2014). According to Phaahla (2014), it is not true that the time spent learning African languages or learning in them is time lost from learning and mastering supposedly more productive and useful languages that enjoy greater status. It is equally not true that learning these languages or learning in them delays students' access to, and mastery of, science, technology and other global and universal disciplines.

It is evident that not all indigenous languages enjoy equal prestige and resources. Language planners and government agencies should ensure that the indigenous languages are used for

the functions assigned to them by allocating the necessary resources for the promotion of languages. They should also provide capacity to facilitate the implementation of the functions (Phaahla, 2014). In a study to investigate the universities' activities to improve the use and status of indigenous languages, Nkuna (2010) found that there was a gap between government language policies and institutional language policies, where the 23 universities in the study were struggling to establish institutional language policies and to make them accessible as required by section 27(2) of the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act 101 of 1997). Furthermore, Nkuna (2010) observed that these universities had tried to conform to this Act to various degrees, but in most cases this was only window dressing. In another study conducted by Kamwendo (2013), it was found that the transformation of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, aimed at addressing the inequalities and other ills of the apartheid era, had taken on board language issues; for instance, isiZulu is being developed and promoted to join English as a language of scholarship. At the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the completion of an isiZulu module is compulsory for all undergraduate students as of 2014. Despite attempts to transform higher education's language policies for the overwhelming majority of black students, the medium of instruction in higher education is a second or even third language, which has a detrimental effect on students' ability to conceptualise properly (see Fourie, 1999). The challenges black students face in higher education because of language are identified by Paul who said;

> *If you compare my performance as a black with the white learner, you can't. I'm studying in his or her language and how can you compare me with someone who is studying the subject in his own language and I'm studying in that person's language and you comparing my performance. So, I think the call was a right call if we do need to decolonise. (Paul interview)*

Paul highlights the struggle with language that black students continue to face in higher education spaces. Black students are required to master the language of instruction in universities in order to succeed, compete with Home language speakers who have the advantage to conceptualise content in their own language. The findings showed that students suffered imperialistic restrictions that infringed on their right to communicate in their preferred language. Gloria shared some experiences in lecture rooms and noted that;

> *When you are in that class that has all these different students, so you have black children who will be adamant and speak in IsiZulu fully*

*knowing that the Indians, whites and coloureds are not understanding what they are saying, and they will tell you we are decolonising the space. So now, it is now in a way they are now excluding others, they (Indians, whites and Coloureds) don't become part of the conversation, you can even see in their facial expression they have disconnected. (Gloria-interview)*

The participant above showed concern for the white, coloured and Indian students who were excluded from class discussions when black students spoke in IsiZulu. However, English is the medium of instruction in most South African universities and black students may feel excluded as English is a second or third language for them. This stems from the normalisation of English as a medium of instruction so much so that anything else is seen as a problem. Ntokozo noted that when we normalise English and set indigenous languages aside, we lose the culture of the indigenous people because culture is carried through language.

*I think my support I can say stems from the worry that I do see us losing our kids to this white way of doing things and of being and we are losing them through our language. How many of our kids don't speak the language now, and our language carries so much history. It has so much substance in it and we are losing it in so many different aspects of being a black person. (Ntokozo- interview)*

As seen in the response by Ntokozo who supported the call to decolonise language, notes that black students were losing their identity because language is associated with their identities and who they are, and therefore if language is lost, then identity would potentially be lost. Colonisation was a system of identity, which saw Eurocentric ways of life as dominant to the indigenous people and their language. This system has had detrimental effects on the identities of the indigenous people. These concerns are reflected in literature, with scholars such as Oyedemi (2018) commenting on the dialectical relationship between language and marginality for Black students, saying;

The exclusionary practices are experienced in many ways, either through language of instruction or an environment that is hostile for racial integration and acceptance. The first-hand accounts of students at a historically White university captured in the documentary film, Luister, remain poignant case studies. A Black student notes in the film

that the culture is so hostile that one has to 'die as a Black person in order to survive at this university (Oyedemi, 2018, p. 9).

In the above quotation, Oyedemi argues that black students are marginalised and excluded in higher education through language and the alienating environment. This argument places greater emphasis on what Gloria mentioned in reference to black students speaking IsiZulu in her lectures. Her reaction to this was that non IsiZulu speakers were excluded. This speaks to the idea that language carries the power to exclude those that do not have access to it. Furthermore, Ntokozo conceptualises in relation to the above quotation that (the culture is so hostile that one has to 'die as a Black person in order to survive' at this university) in how black students are conforming. One can conclude that language carries culture and is a means in which individuals identify themselves.

I now move on to discussing identity as an important part of the call to decolonise individuals.

## 5.4 THEME 4: DECOLONISATION AS IDENTITY

Identity was identified as an important part of decolonisation by the participants. The findings highlighted the need for decolonisation to focus on the individual person first. It was suggested by a participant that when you decolonise the person, then the person is able to fit into any space without having to change who they are. Bongani elaborated on reasons why students are challenged in the university space, and indicated that it is due to a misrepresentation of who they are;

> *because we don't have identity even families they don't worry about identities that's what is was happening here is that people are trying to rob other people their power and their identities in order for them to have those powers so when these kids are growing now they are growing with no identities they don't want to own the space. (Bongani-interview).*

The suggestion made by Bongani was that each person must take ownership of their own identity. They need to identify their needs and seek to fulfil them. Furthermore, the participant noted that if people follow the decolonisation agenda, they must question whose needs decolonisation is serving because everybody does not have the same needs.

If you decolonise for everyone, whose needs are you actually fulfilling? *Gloria* also positioned the decolonisation call as an individual endeavour and noted that;

> *For me, for decolonising the curriculum is a last resort. I think we first have to decolonise our minds, the thinking, the understanding because I can't get to decolonise the documents or the theories and the philosophies when my mind is still thinking or is still stuck in a colonial way. So it starts with the individuals because decolonisation is broad and it goes a very long way like even decolonising the space itself that the space that we are in was previously a white space and when you come in we also wonder how people are reading your presence in the space. (Gloria-interview)*

What was common between the participants above was the agency individuals have in decolonising themselves. Gloria highlighted the challenges of decolonising the curriculum; how it cannot begin with the philosophical approaches or the curriculum documents. For Gloria, decolonisation is existential in the sense that it has to begin with the individuals themselves before any material change can take place. These challenges are reflected on and theorised by Kumalo (2018) who suggests that the universities themselves are deeply implicated and involved in the social construction and production of what Kumalo (2018) refers to as the "natives of nowhere", that is, black students whose identities, cultures, and ontological being is not recognised by the university.

> Through positing the educational journey as a mode of responding to the challenges which plague post-conflictual societies like South Africa, by revealing the humanity of the other, we are confronted with the question of abjection and negation specifically when we recognise education as a humanising tool. *Framing education as a humanising tool has proven to have significant implications for this argument, in light of the claim that HWUs create the Native of Nowhere. The abjection of Blackness/Indigeneity which creates the Native of Nowhere rests on the acts of decolonising the university that do little to recognise the ontological position of Blackness/Indigeneity within the academe. While HWUs claim to be decolonising, acts of decolonisation are not supported by active inclusion and the recognition of the epistemic value of non-European/Anglo-American epistemic frameworks.* Thus, inclusion in HWUs becomes an act of tokenism. This experience of tokenism compounds the oscillation of Blackness/Indigeneity which is denied existence in the academe while its reality, truth and knowledge are questioned outside the academe (emphasis added) (Kumalo, 2018, p. 14).

In the above quotation, Kumalo (2018) cautions us that starting decolonisation with focusing on ourselves, as recommended by Bongani and Gloria, could be potentially challenging, especially for students and academics who are based in historically white universities.

The next theme presents some of the challenges expressed by participants when asked about their conceptual understanding of decolonisation of curricula, mainly some of the confusions, ambiguities and concerns they have.

## 5.5 THEME 5: DECOLONISATION AS CONFUSION

Decolonisation as confusion was a notable issue amongst participants. The confusion stemmed from an unclear definition of what it means to decolonise. The findings suggested that academics were not actively decolonising the curriculum because they did not know where to start. One participant noted that;

> *We need to have a clearer picture of what the decolonisation means. What are the implications for 21st century South Africa and in a fast-paced world where are we going to be able to define this? Then it makes it a lot easier, do you want to say okay let's stop using English as a medium of instruction completely in the higher education? so when we stop using that then how do we teach science and technology that is going to practice not only in South Africa how do we remain globally relevant and competitive if we want to say or turn our back to the rest of the world is that even what decolonisation means? (Moses-interview)*

> *It is taking time for me to really get to a deep understanding of what do these people mean who are advocating for decolonisation. To some extent, I got involved in a committee which was involved in curriculum transformation in another university and I discovered there a lot of misunderstandings about what does this mean. For example, the argument about removing international articles and ensure that in your course you put more South African or African literature. Though I would not call or say that is not decolonisation but for me, it was a limited understanding of what decolonisation is so because of that, I must admit there has been some reluctance from my side to go with the call. (Paul-interview)*

> *I also heard these people who are specialists in decolonising…. whatever speaking about decoloniality and I'm like what the hell and that for me is what a total turn off because I really don't understand what it is about and it confuses me the decolonisation but I'm aware that in my teaching I need to, seem to be introducing things like that or more like that. (Mbali-interview)*

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The participants pointed to a growing need to define what decolonisation is before we can respond to the call for transformation (see Mbembe, 2015). The findings indicate that participants are not sure where to start in decolonising the curriculum in their space. When asked what decolonisation for them is, there was varying responses and some indicated that their limited understandings is from what others were saying. This conceptual confusion had implications for enacting curricula, teaching and learning, or even policies for transformation. What was common among participants' responses was their inability to decolonise their own work because, although the universities' transformation policies were in place, they did not have academic freedom to just change their courses.

I now move on to discussing the next theme that featured prominently in the data that saw the call to decolonise higher education curriculum as alienating.

## 5.6 THEME 6: HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM IS ALIENATING FOR STUDENTS

Another theme that came up was the notion that curricula could be alienating for students (see for example, Langa, 2017). During the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall student movements, participants mentioned that they were starting to interrogate the curriculum. According to Nyamnjoh (2017), a characteristic feature of #RhodesMustFall was a feeling of alienation and disturbed relations of appropriation expressed as black pain; a pain which is the collection of experiences of institutional racism. Black pain in this context relates to black students' experiences of being excluded from their learning space and belonging in the university. Students began to interrogate the curriculum as noted by participants who stated that:

> *The curriculum is still colonised so we are using Western curriculum therefore they (students) may rather not write examination they would rather repeat the years next year so you see so for me it was like students were saying we are just blackmailing you with that because I don't think when they came back to their senses they were going to reject examinations like that. (Bongani-Interview)*

> *We have the issue with teaching what is familiar with the students. In lecture, students don't attend we don't know why they don't want to attend, what is chasing students away from lectures? Is it because the content is not responding to the needs of the students or is it our pedagogy is it our methodologies of teaching. Perhaps decolonisation is meant to respond to the needs of the African child in the class the*

*way they are learning the knowledge that we are teaching, the knowledge that the student is familiar with (Mbali -interview)*

*I think that it is very important that the curriculum is decolonised I grew up in a context where my worldview as an African person for instance was completely removed from my education worldview my educational experiences so as a rural young man I had practices and experiences which were not given attention in the educational system in the classroom so I was taught science and technology in an abstract Westernized way which did not have a direct link to who I am as a person. (Moses- interview)*

Bongani recalls students' refusal to write examination on account that the curriculum was still colonised. What is important to note in Bongani's narrative is the frustration students encountered due to the inability to relate to an alienating curriculum which remained Westernised, and their refusal to write exams. Mbali stated that students were not attending lectures and critiqued the pedagogical practices and content which was still Westernised. Moses acknowledges that the curriculum is indeed alienating which fails to account for the African experience as he recalls how his worldview was removed from his own educational experience. According to Wolff (2016), black students' experience of alienation was due to foreign course content at university, because what is taught does not fit into what they learn at home.

Moses describes the importance of learning in context because of the relationship between one's identity and social context. Scholars such as Ngcobozi (2015) argue that the feeling of institutional alienation and marginality as "whiteness" in its ability to re-center white ontologies in institutions of higher learning against black pain and its subjectivity. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) argues that, despite efforts to embrace the work by African academics in the curriculum, the structural framework of Eurocentric epistemology remains. The protesters of the #RhodesMustFall movement, comprising mostly black students, staff and workers, called for the incomplete transformation of higher education institutions, decolonisation of institutional culture and the curriculum (Luckett, 2016).

The theme that follows is the last theme, where I discuss the implications decolonisation of the curriculum has for internationalisation.

**5.7 THEME 7: INTERNATIONALISATION CONCERNS FOR DECOLONISATION**

Another theme that came up in the data was the notion of decolonisation which sparked concerns among participants who felt that correcting colonisation would have a negative impact on internationalisation. Fomunyam (2019) argues that decolonisation needs to factor in internationalisation because the growing concern is mentioned in the participants' responses:

> *There is a whole pool of knowledge that our children are supposed to be able to move across all kinds of spaces, I want to make an example for my son, I want him to be able to be an African who is able to see value in other global spaces and fit in also in those as well but still have anchored in his Africanness. (Ntokozo- interview)*

> *I think the draft policy of internationalisation it creates a barrier towards a full-on decolonisation. Policy is instructing the university to expose students to the International debates and that's in terms of curriculum. We have to include what is happening throughout the world you have to have programs where you get international students visiting scholars. So for me, if we were decolonise our largely Western curriculum to suit our needs some of the programmes will not be compatible with certain programs overseas. (Sipho-Interview)*

These responses emanate from an understanding of decolonisation as a return to Africanisation, which would entail excluding Eurocentric models and focusing on Africa and what is African. However, Sipho warns us that policies on internationalisation creates a barrier to full decolonisation. Both participants were not of the idea that Africa can exclude themselves to the global pool of knowledge. Participants acknowledged the contribution Europe has made on the African continents and warns that, if we were to go back to what is African, Africa will develop as other nations are developing.

Some key debates in literature resonates with participates concerns of decolonisation and internationalisation as part of the decolonial agenda in higher education. It is important to highlight emerging contestations in the field regarding the tension between decolonisation and internationalisation, and where we need to go as a field. For Du Preez (2018), internationalisation is sometimes perceived as a threat to decolonisation since it might lead to recolonisation by cunning international forces.

Wa-Thiong'o (2004), as cited in Botha (2007) argues that thought should be given 'as to how Africa can extricate itself from the seeming dilemma it finds itself in, by taking advantage of the enormous opportunities offered by the Global Village.' Internationalising in a decolonial

context is solidarity among those who share common experiences of colonisation, oppression around the world, and involves recognising different knowledge traditions by reframing one's own view in the light of the views of others (Le Grange, 2018). Mheta, Lungu and Govender (2018) argue that the current situation in which a particular university in the KwaZulu-Natal area, has more partnerships with universities in the Global North only serves to perpetuate hegemony. They posit that local universities should strengthen partnerships with local and other universities in Africa. In other words, higher education institutions should start collaborating from the viewpoint of what Africa and the Global South has to offer and not what Africa can receive from the Global North in order to internationalise as well as decolonise and transform the curriculum in higher education. Our aspiration in internationalising is to dismantle epistemic violence that emanated from the Global North.

**5.8 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I discussed the emerging themes from the semi-structure interviews. These included decolonisation as responding to Eurocentric thought; decolonisation as a political agenda; decolonisation, a language; decolonisation as identity; decolonisation as confusion; higher education curriculum alienating, and internationalisation challenges for decolonisation. In the following chapter, I begin to theorise the data in relation to social constructionist theory that frames this study.

# CHAPTER SIX

# THEORISING THE FINDINGS

## 6.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous discussion, a thematic analysis was provided by suspending the theory and presenting findings as they came out from the participants. In this chapter, I begin to draw on the theoretical tools to make sense of the findings. For the purpose of this research, the views of Vivienne Burr on social constructionism are used in theorising the data. Burr (2015) maintains that social constructionism denies that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality. Instead, as a culture or society, we construct versions of reality between us. It is a theoretical framework that sees the importance of social relations regarding our perceptions, feelings and how we attach meaning to our realities. This section focuses on academics' perceptions, feelings and the meaning they attach to decolonising the curricular in higher education.

One of the principles of social constructionism is that it takes a critical stance towards the take for granted knowledge. Burr (2015) suggests that;

> Social constructionism insists that we take a critical stance towards our taken for granted ways of understanding the world and ourselves. It invites us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world. It therefore, opposes what is referred to as positivism and empiricism, epistemology positions that are characteristics of the hard sciences (Burr, 2015, p. 2).

It is this taken for granted character of social constructionism that enable them to persist across time and what makes them so hard to change when we do question them. Social constructionism opens up avenues to multiple perspectives and questions what we consider as normal. All that we have come to see as normal in life is actually social constructions; and when we start to question them, we become aware of the taken for granted nature of our reality (see Burr, 2015). Therefore, it is an appropriate theoretical framework underpinning this study and helps to understand the multiple perspectives of the education academics in the study and how they attach meaning to decolonising the curricular in higher education.

The concept of social constructionism relates to the way we understand the world in which, according to Burr (2015), history and culture play a significant role in producing specific knowledge. This implies that we construct our world based on the foundations of our history and through cultural practices. The influence of social constructionism's historical and cultural specificity of knowledge provides a theoretical approach that is helpful in exploring how education academics in the study conceptualised decolonisation of the curricular in higher education. Social constructionism provides a rich contextual meaning to the perceptions of education academics, and how history and culture influence their perceptions and shape their attitudes on decolonising the curriculum in higher education.

## 6.1 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF KNOWLEDGE

Historical and cultural processes of knowledge in social constructionism theory suggest that knowledge can be culturally located to particular regions (Burr, 2015). In other words, how we come to know is rooted in cultural and historic constructions. Heleta (2018) argues that the absence of an African or Africa- focused scholarship and curriculum in higher education is not a historical omission or mistake. It represents the influence and dominance of Eurocentric knowledge as foundational knowledge and African knowledge or other knowledge as inferior. The dominance of Eurocentric and American knowledge of the Global North is realised by continuously seeking to present itself as universal; and for African knowledge systems, it is always indigenous. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) cites (Hountondji 1997) who argues that;

> Because knowledge has continued to radiate from a hegemonic centre despite the existence of a globalised world, there is an urgent need to 'provincialize' Europe and North America while 'deprovincialising' Africa. The fact is that what today masquerades as the 'global knowledge economy' has a hegemonic centre from which it circulates that centre is Europe and North America. This approach helps to rectify the marginality of knowledges from Africa and the Global South within the so-called 'global knowledge economy'. This marginalisation of African scholarship is sustained by a deliberate uneven division of intellectual labour rooted in imperialism and colonialism, in which scholars of Africa and the rest of the Global South have been reduced to hunter-gatherers of raw data that is turned into theories in the Global North. African scholars become mainly 'native informants' as well as consumers of theories, concepts and methodologies cascading from the Global North (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 25).

Transformation through decolonising the curriculum would give indigenous African knowledge systems their rightful place as equal ways of knowing among the array of

knowledge systems of the world (Higgs, 2016). So in essence, African knowledge systems is never really just knowledge and global but always indigenous. Some participants' perspective on decolonising curricular in higher education is conceptualised as dismantling Eurocentric knowledge in a bid to recenter African knowledge. In doing so, participants suggest that knowledge needs to be contextualised. Furthermore, some participants suggest that the history and rich culture of the diverse students in higher education curricular should not be alienating to students (see Langa, 2017). In other words, the curriculum and pedagogical practices should reflect and meet the needs of students lived experiences (see Ngcobozi, 2015; Maringira and Gukurume, 2017). Bongani and Celine reflected on the need to dismantle knowledge from the dominant Eurocentric thought in the higher education curricular by stating that;

> *it is about contextualising knowledge, it is about making knowledge more relevant to people by bringing knowledge home you know it's about removing the blankets which was originally from the West and the type of education which the west conceived as being suitable for us in Africa so it is about finding ourselves and delivering the kind of education that is suitable for us (Bongani -interview)*

> *there was a call for decolonisation within the tertiary education curriculum and I think that stems from the fact that we've been exposed to Eurocentric Philosophes ways and that didn't make sense for them our new coming students because they realised after all basic philosophies European philosophies for instance stemmed from Egypt which is in Africa Country. Aristotle was claimed to have stolen some of his philosophies from Egyptians so I think students realised something needs to be done, that history needs to be rewritten corrected and revised. (Celine -Interview)*

The above views by Bongani and Celine relates to the recentering of African epistemologies in higher education curricular which is central to the broader project of achieving social justice in the Global South. Pillay (2016) argues that for a humanist agenda to prevail, and for psychology to truly serve humanity, we ought to challenge violent epistemological beliefs that are founded on European ideals. Social constructionists maintain that knowledge is historical and culturally specific, therefore; recentering knowledge back to Africa or the Global South to reflect its people and culture is a just call in the decolonising agenda. Similarly, Moses echoes similar sentiments to Bongani's on the need to contextualise knowledge so that it is relevant to students; making it relatable for them to comprehend. Moses noted that;

*Curriculum should be decolonised. I am 100% in support of that you talk about things like medicine. For instance, growing up, I remember as a child when we go out to play soccer, you will have injuries. You knew the kind of leaves you can take from the bushes, you place it on your injury and your injury will be healed; but I do not know the chemical compositions of those leaves and I don't even know if those leaves still exist or if I can recognise them. This is the way I should be taught biology and life sciences because I am living life sciences in my local world. You can't be teaching me about fruits and leaves that are in Europe when I have my own leaves here, does that make sense? The Knowledge I am being taught is completely removed from my Reality. (Moses-interview 8)*

Moses made reference to how his knowledge of leaves and plants and how to cure his wounds from injuries was cultural knowledge that was removed from his educational experiences. This is knowledge that social constructionists perceived as specific knowledge in a particular social context. This knowledge may have been passed down from generation to generation perhaps in his community or family. He also made emphasis on the importance of knowledge being part of his formal education. Here, Moses argued for dismantling Eurocentric knowledge by stating that he could not be learning in isolation to his social context. The reference Moses made above posits that knowledge is embedded in history and culture, and Africans have ways they deal with issues that are unique to them.

The findings also suggests that African epistemologies should be recentered in the higher education curricular without necessarily rejecting knowledge from the Global North. Heleta (2018), Mbembe (2015) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) draw from Wa Thiong'o's (1986) argument that calls for conceptualising epistemic freedom in South African higher education were not necessarily about epistemic rejection of non-African scholarship as suggested by Makgoba (1996). This is evident in what Mbali and Danielle called for, universalising African knowledge systems or possibly recentering them (see for example Ndlovu Gatsheni (2017); Heleta (2016).

*In university, what we can do of cause we are not saying that we must remove entirely what is Western parts maybe modified it to fit the African context or our context (Mbali interview)*

*The fact that there was a huge call we really need to think about decolonisation so we need to think about it but at the same time the idea is not necessarily chuck away all the theories and then bring in*

*African scholars. We need to find a way how can we merge the two because they are theories of the Dead white men that are still applicable, that you can still use, whether in full or in part. Well then, obviously we also need to find again African scholars and their work and merge the two. It is important also for an African child to see that there are African people who are intelligent or genius. (Gloria interview)*

There is a strong recognition that all knowledge is historical and culturally relevant, including Eurocentric thought. In the call to dismantle epistemic violence through dominant Eurocentric thought, participants felt that there could not be a complete decolonisation that only focused on African knowledge or Africanising the curricula.

*Well, for me, I think it will start with the selection of readings who are we selecting and why we selecting them. So, currently, I'm not teaching and what I used to do before I used to ask myself the question who am I selecting? And why must selecting? From which regions of the world? Because I think it is important, especially in higher education there's a policy draft on internationalisation and I think knowing you and the student exchange was also part of the project of internationalisation where we need to expose our students to the different parts of the world (Sipho interview)*

*When we talk about institutional systems, for instance, if you are doing a PhD, you are told to use local literature, national literature and international literature. When it comes to your examination, national, international examiners in terms of your PhD should have reviewed it as well for it to be valid. The fact that you are asking for international person, it's a mandated thing it's not like it's a choice, then what are we saying? We have an internal examiner and a national examiner and then an international examiner before your thesis can be termed as valid. So, what are we saying? So, we are not just producing knowledge for Africa, we are reproducing knowledge that should speak to a global space. So when you are giving an international person, purely what must they connect with? You get what I mean so we are contradicting ourselves in different ways (Ntokozo interview)*

Sipho and Ntokozo present arguments on restrictions that may present themselves if we have to decolonise by excluding the global community. The policy draft on internationalisation in higher education is to integrate or infuse intercultural scholarship (Du Preez, 2018). The idea is to foster an appreciation of cultural knowledge. The idea to recenter African epistemologies

in higher education could serve as a way to universalise African epistemologies in the internationalisation agenda, through exposing student to global African scholarship and all its nuances, complexities and diversity.

## 6.2 LANGUAGE AS PRECONDITION FOR THOUGHT

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, language is a precondition for thought, where we construct our world through language, using a social constructionism perspective. Social constructionism theory, we mediate our reality through language. According to Burr (2015), we cannot view language and thought as two separate phenomena which affect each other. They are inseparable and language provides the basis for all our thoughts. This implies that meaning is negotiated and shared through language. In other words, the very categories and concepts that provide a framework of meaning are provided by the language and discourse people use (Burr, 2015, pg. 10). This suggests that we think through language, where it is impossible to conceptualise or to argue without language. Echoing Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1968), Turner (2016) notes that;

> Meaning is established through the use of language within what he titled a "language-game," and to give an account of the meaning of an utterance we do not need to invoke logical rules but we need to describe how the utterance is used within a specific language-game. The agreement reached by using a language, by playing a specific language-game, is not merely an agreement in opinions but an agreement reached by sharing a specific form of life. In other words, the relationship between the word "red" and a specific event in the world, a specific colour, is not established according to logical rules but according to the conventional agreement reached within a specific language-game, within a specific form of life.

The social interactions in the production of knowledge purport that language is more than the means in which we express ourselves because language transmits meaning and culture. Furthermore, language gains its meaning from its use in context (McNamee, 2004). According to Cojocaru and Bragaru (2012), meaning is the product of the dominant cultural frame of social, linguistic, discursive and symbolic practices. One has to explore the dominant social frame and posit how language is implicated in how meaning is socially constructed. For Jackson (2008), language mediates much of what occurs in society, where a particular cultural or contextual competency is a prerequisite to participating with others in shaping society, and one's interests are hindered if they fall outside the spectrum of legitimated concerns (Jackson,

2008). Luke (1999) echoes Foucault's concern with how language works to, not only produce meaning, but also particular kinds of objects and subjects upon which and through which particular relations of power are realised. Power relations in language ensure that not all voices carry the same weight (see for example Jackson, 2018).

The discussion above helps us understand the dynamics of language as a social construct. In order to understand the education academics' multiple realties about the phenomenon studied, one needs to note that language carries culture, meaning and power. Paul compares language in a decolonial context as a continuation of the marginalisation of black students.

> *We will stop complaining about poor results and all that because we will be learning what is ours. We are busy learning other people stuff if other countries learn Isizulu they not learning Zulu because they have to master it because they have to write things in Isizulu. They are learning it because they have to participate in a global society so the same thing we should learn English should not be the determinant of our success. (Paul-interview)*

Paul attributes poor results in higher education by acknowledging that majority of black students are learning a curriculum that is alienating to them because their success in higher education is dependent on mastery of the language of instruction which is English. Paul's understanding confirms a social constructionist view that language allows one to participate in society, and without language, you are unable to successfully navigate the systems of society. According to Burr (2015), each person acquires concepts and categories as they develop the use of language, which are reproduced everyday by everyone who shares the culture and a language. Danielle conceptualises language thus;

> *If we are seeing our languages and our cultures eroded, then it worries me. So, what is it as African people we are doing in order to make sure that we maintain and we continue so that the next generation will be able to see the importance of being African (Gloria-interview)*

> *But it starts with my son, for instance, to say you speak English when you are at school but when we are home you speak is Izulu in fact I was reading his report and I was laughing because this teachers don't know me they was saying that they can tell that he does not speak the English language at home and I'm going to tell the principal in January that he will continue not speaking English in the house all the other grown kids*

*they went through the same thing. He will catch up, he does speak English probably not in the way that they want he is 4 years old he will get there he speaks enough English for me but he needs to do it at school to the teachers you should not apparently he reacts in Isizulu it's fine it means he knows who he is when he gets upset he responds in Isizulu and that's who he is (Ntokozo-interview)*

The philosophical theory of social constructionism underpinning this study sees language as a precondition for thought but the findings ask us to pause, and rethink the dynamics of language as a precondition of being and becoming. From the data, the participants conceptualised language as a reclamation of identity, of being and becoming. This suggest that we exists in language (see for example Gergen & Gergen, 1991). Language is also deeply political and was contested within the 2015-2016 student movements, with the #OpenStellenoboschCollectve reflecting on the hegemonic use of language as a political tool to isolate, abuse and marginalise

> Every day students and staff who do not understand Afrikaans are excluded from learning and participating at Stellenbosch University. As black students we are frequently asked, "Why do you come here if you can't speak Afrikaans?" This question highlights the pervasive and problematic sense of ownership that some have over this University. Stellenbosch – like all universities – is a public institution. This is not an Afrikaans university. It is a South African university which offers instruction in Afrikaans and (to a lesser extent) English. We have personally experienced countless instances of this institutional racism, including being forced to ask our Afrikaans-speaking peers to interpret what "Huiskomitee" members are saying in residence meetings. When we are allocated rooms, we are intentionally paired with other black students. Initiation at our residences involves explicit racism, homophobia and intimidation. It's telling that we actively discourage our black school-leaving friends from considering Stellenbosch as a place to study. This is in an attempt to spare them the pain and humiliation of being silently subjugated by a passively hostile culture of white Afrikanerdom (Open Stellenbosch Collective, 2015).

In the above quotation, the student movements exposed how language was used as tool of power through exclusion. The Afrikaans language brings back the painful history of the Soweto uprising of 1976 where school learners were forced to learn in Afrikaans. Issues of alienation and discrimination were evident at this university. Stellenbosch University was one of the universities set up to preserve the legacies of apartheid (Badat, 2017). One needs to interrogate the extent to which universities have and are, transforming higher education in policy and in practice.

**6.3 CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented a theoretical discussion using social constructionism as a theoretical framework. This chapter is part two of two which discussed the key findings and discussions of the study. I started the chapter briefly discussing social constructionism as the theoretical framework that I used. I then moved to theoretically discussing in detail, the social constructionist concept of historically and culturally specific knowledge, and language as a precondition for thought. I showed how the theoretical discussions offered some useful insight to make sense of the data. In the following chapter, I give the summary, major findings, and recommendation of the study.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# SUMMARY, MAJOR FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

## 7.0 INTRODUCTION

This study set out to explore Education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising the curriculum in South African higher education. In the previous chapter, a theoretical analysis of the findings was presented. This chapter provides a brief summary of the chapters covered. It then discusses a summary of the key findings, with the aim of showing how the study responded to the research questions. It ends with recommendations for further research and the conclusion.

## 7.1 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

### Chapter one

The first chapter of this study provided an introduction to the study by providing a general overview of the rationale for the study, and a description of the context in which the research took place. The research objectives and research questions were also highlighted for the reader as well as what the researcher hoped to achieve out of the research study.

### Chapter two

In this literature review chapter, I review the broader calls for South African higher education transformation and decolonisation of higher education as a field. The literature focused on the history of higher education institutions in South Africa, founded on segregation in the colonial and apartheid era. Thereafter, a discussion on higher education institutions' failure to transform despite transformation policies such as the Education White paper 3 and the The Soudien Report was made. The chapter then discussed the student protests movements that ignited the call to transform  higher education, namely; the #RhodesMustfall and #FeesMustfall movements  was discussed in  higher education in a post-apartheid South Africa.

### Chapter three

This chapter discussed the research methodology and methods used to generate data. The philosophical underpinnings of the study were presented by describing qualitative research and interpretivist paradigm as a research methodology used in order to answer the research questions. A case study methodology was used in this study and semi structured interviews

were used to collect the data was discussed. The last section explained how the study addressed ethical issues and the limitations of the study.

**Chapter four**

Chapter four discussed social constructionism as a theoretical framework to frame this study. This chapter gave a detailed explanation of the concepts that make up social constructionism as a theoretical framework. The concepts discussed employed Viviane Burr's views on social constructionism as a social process; historical and specificity of knowledge and language as a precondition for thought.

**Chapter five**

This chapter presented the findings of the study. This chapter was one of two that focused on presenting and theorising the data. In this chapter, I provided a thematic analysis which allowed for the "data to speak for itself". This was done by presenting themes that emerged through the semi structured interviews where transcripts were read several times using in text comments to highlight experiences, opinions and challenges of the participants.

**Chapter six**

In chapter six, a thematic analysis was provided. In this chapter, theorising the findings of the study was done in an attempt at making (theoretical) sense of the findings. This chapter discussed the findings of the study in relation to the theoretical framework and the literature.

**7.2 MAJOR FINDINGS**

This section discusses the major finding in this study, informed by three research questions and the themes that emerge from participates semi-structured interviews. The findings responded to the research questions which are: 1. What are academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising curriculum in South Africa's higher education? 2. To what extent, do education academics understand the call for decolonising curriculum in South African higher education? 3. To what extent do academics embrace or reject the calls for decolonising of South African higher education curriculum? The way in which these research questions were addressed is discussed below.

## 7.3 DISMANTLE DOMINANT EUROCENTRIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

Academics in this study conceptualised the call to decolonise the curriculum in higher education as dismantling Eurocentric knowledge which is the dominant discourse in the curriculum. The findings suggested that the curriculum is alienating. The academics in this study expressed the need for students' educational experiences to reflect their context and acknowledged that the curriculum is still dominated by Eurocentric thought. The findings also suggest that the curriculum should be transformed by acknowledging what Africa has to offer in terms of knowledge globally. The academics suggested that this would require a rethinking or a redirection of worldviews to the African perspective. However, the findings also indicated that the process of recentering African epistemologies does not mean an erasure of Eurocentric thought. What academics' acknowledged was the need for African knowledge to have an equal weight as other knowledge from all over the world.

## 7.4 DECOLONISING LANGUAGES

The concept of decolonising the curriculum included the challenges of language, where language is seen to continue to marginalise black students in this historically white only teachers' college. The academics' understanding of decolonising the curriculum entails a rethinking or the challenging of language because English is the medium of instruction, despite it being a second language for the majority of students. Students have to navigate the challenges of language in order to succeed. The findings showed the complexities of language as, not only a precondition for thought as suggested by the theoretical framework, but also a precondition for being and becoming. This study found that language carries culture where language cannot be viewed as separate entities from culture and being. The study found that decolonising language was important for achieving the decolonial agenda where African languages needed to be embraced more in higher education institutions.

## 7.5 INTERNATIONALISATION CONCERNS FOR DECOLONISATION

The extent to which academics rejected the call for decolonisation was based on the impact decolonisation would pose on internationalisation. The findings suggested that universities could not have full decolonisation because they had policy drafts that ensured scholarship with countries around the globe. That meant, in terms of staying relevant in terms of knowledge

within the global community, African institutions had something to offer. We cannot always look to the Global North to inform what we constitute as knowledge, the Global South need to also inform knowledge in the Global North.

## 7.6 DECOLONISATION IS CONFUSING

A major finding in the study was the issue of confusion in which academics struggled to define the term decolonisation. Many found that the starting point in the call to decolonise the curriculum in educational institutions was a common understanding of what decolonisation entailed. The varying understandings that were discussed in the interviews indicated that there is great confusion where some academics understand decolonisation from hearsay situations. In the confusion, some academics felt that decolonisation was just a new buzz word that makes for good research and would soon die out. For others, it was part of the transformation agenda to redress the inequalities that still existed in society and in higher education. The confusion for some of these academics led to them not decolonising their own pedagogical practices and stated that a clearer understanding would be requisite. The academics in this study embraced the call to decolonise the curriculum and made it clear that the African child and African scholars needed to be recognised in the curriculum.

## 7.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- More research needs to be done so that there is a common understanding of what it means to decolonise the curriculum in higher education in the South African context.
- There is a gap in literature on providing an understanding of what it means to transform a curriculum and what it means to decolonise a curriculum. Further research should be done on this so that we do not think we are decolonising the curriculum yet we are transforming it.
- Studies should be conducted on how to develop a curriculum that is inclusive and celebrates diversity, one which does not rely solely on the traditional or Western model of thinking.

## 7.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

We need to find a way to narrow down the term decolonisation and what it entails. The confusion on decolonisation in higher education had negative implications on moving with the decolonial agenda to transform higher education. The findings suggested that academics were

confused with what decolonisation meant in general, and what it meant for them personally, for changing their pedagogical practices. Therefore, academics need to be workshopped on how they can transform their pedagogical practices to move with the decolonial agenda. A workshop without measures to monitor implementation would be a futile activity. Academics need to be monitored and given the flexibility to implement measures to decolonise the curriculum in their practice.

In terms of internationalisation and the fear of recolonisation through scholarship partnership with the Global North, I recommend that countries that have suffered and are struggling because of colonisation should form partnerships with countries that have been successful in establishing themselves in terms of focusing on what they have to offer in terms of knowledge and offer it to the world. In other words, more should be done to establish Global South partnerships.

## 7.9 CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to explore education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising the curriculum in higher education. The objective was to explore the extent to which the selected academics embraced and rejected the call to decolonise curricula. In order to fulfil these objectives, the following research questions guided the study: 1. what are academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising curriculum in South Africa's Higher Education? 2. To what extent, do education academics understand the call for decolonising curriculum in South African higher education? 3. To what extent do academics embrace or reject the calls for decolonising of South African higher education curriculum? I presented the findings of the study, which suggested that academics embrace the call to decolonise the curriculum in higher education. Academics embraced the call to recenter African epistemologies, and to embrace African languages in the curriculum. Their reluctance to go with calls for decolonisng the curriculum stemmed from not knowing how or what to change in their pedagogical practices.

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# Annexure A –Ethical Clearence Certificate

**UNIVERSITY OF** ™
**KWAZULU-NATAL**

**INYUVESI**
**YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

25 June 2019

**Ms Innocentia Alexander 212545769**
**School of Education**
**Edgewood Campus**

Dear Ms Alexander

**Protocol reference number**: HSS/0236/019M
**Project Title**: Dismantling epistemic violence? Exploring education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonizing curriculum in South African higher education.

**Full Approval – Expedited Application**

Your application dated 27 Mar 2019, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

**The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 1 year from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.**

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

...... ..............
**Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)**

**/px**

cc Supervisor: Mr MN Hlatshwayo
cc. Academic Leader Research: Dr A Pillay
cc. School Administrator: Ms S Jeenarain, Ms M Ngcobo, Ms N Dlamini and Mr SN Mthembu

# Annexure B –Gatekeeper Certificate

**UNIVERSITY OF** ™
**KWAZULU-NATAL**

**INYUVESI**
**YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

13 May 2019

Ms Innocentia Alexander (SN 212545769)
School of Education
College of Humanities
Edgewood Campus
UKZN
Email: hlatshwayom@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Ms Alexander

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

*"Dismantling epistemic violence? Exploring Education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonizing curriculum in South African higher education".*

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with staff on the Edgewood campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:
- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

**MR SS MOKOENA**
**REGISTRAR**

# Annexure C – Consent form for Academics

Dear Participants

**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

My name is Innocentia Alexander, I am a Curriculum Med. candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus, in South Africa. I am interested in exploring Education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising curriculum in South African higher education. The student protests of 2015 and 2016, through the #FeesMustFall followed by the #RhodesMustFall movements ignited a call to decolonise the curriculum in South African higher education institutions. Many stakeholders within the higher education institutions such as academics and higher education management had to respond to the students' demands to decolonise the curriculum. My study will explore academics conceptual understanding of decolonising the curriculum. Therefore, to gather the information for my study, your participation is of paramount importance for this research to be successful.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed, as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- There will be no limit on any benefit that the participants may receive as part of their participation in this research project;
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalised for taking such an action.
- The participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves;
- Real names of the participants will not be used, but symbols such as A,B,C,D,E and F will be used to represent participants' names;

- The research aims at knowing the challenges of your community relating to resource scarcity, peoples' movement, and effects on peace.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

|  | Willing | Not willing |
|---|---|---|
| Audio equipment |  |  |

I can be contacted at:

Email: innocentia09@gmail.com

Cell: 072 5820 466

My supervisor is Mr. M Hlatshwayo who is located at the School of Education, Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: HlatshwayoM@ukzn.ac.za     Phone number: 031 260 3671


Discipline coordinator is Dr. Nomkhosi Nzimande

Curriculum Studies, School of Education,

Edgewood College, University of KwaZulu-Natal

(Tel) 0312603357 Email: nzimandem2@ukzn.ac.za


You may also contact the Research Office through:

Ximba Phumelele

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031 260 3587 E-mail: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research

**DECLARATION**

I……………………………………………………………………… (Full name and surname of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research study, and I consent to participating in the research study.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time, should I wish to do so. A copy of this document has been given to me to retain.

**Signature of participant**                               **Date**

_____              _____

# Annexure D – Academics Interview Schedule

## Academics semi-structured interview schedule

**Project title**

Dismantling epistemic violence? Exploring Education academics' conceptual understanding of decolonising curriculum in South African higher education.

**Background questions**

**Introduction**

Tell me about yourself?

Where are you from?

Where did you study? Majors?

Qualifications?

How long have you been at this university for?

a. What is your understanding of decolonisation?

b. Where you present during the 2015-2016 student protests, if yes, what were your experiences?

c. Do you remember some of the key issues?

d. Where students not disruptive?

e. Did you support the 2015-2016 student protests for decolonising of higher education curriculum? Yes, no, why?

f. What is your understanding of the calls for decolonising higher education curriculum? What are we called to decolonise exactly?

g. According to you, what would a decolonised curriculum look like?

h. Can we change the curriculum? Why? Why not?

i. Should we change the curriculum…why? Why not?

**Concluding question**

Is there something you want to talk about that I did not ask you? About transformation or decolonising the curriculum.