

Intersections of Decolonial and Global Citizenship Principles in Academic Literacy Curricula

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Abstract: Persistent South African dialogue around curricula decoloniality and epistemic pluralism in the higher education system evolves. However, an unresolved question between decolonial and global citizenship education advocates remains: How may these paradigms methodically intersect in an academic literacy curriculum by enhancing development in associated conventions? This study and literature review aimed to conceptually address this question. The results of this literature review indicated that while decolonial and global citizenship education scholars advance valid claims for implementing curricula that draw on their philosophies, additional thought is required that addresses how these paradigms may jointly address students' needs in relation to applying academic literacy practices. By drawing on key arguments and concerns in the analyzed literature, this study advanced the claim that academic literacy modules are suitable environments to observe the interplay of decolonial and global citizenship methodologies. This is because the discipline of academic literacy, due to its social and interdisciplinary nature, draws on the cultures, histories, and inter-relatedness of humans, including scholars, who employ its conventions.

Keywords: Decoloniality, Global Citizenship Education, Academic Literacy, Curriculum

Introduction

In contemporary South African higher education, there is an immense interest in curricula transformation, Africanization, and decolonization (Le Grange and Beets 2005; Kumalo 2018). There exists equal recognition that universities contribute toward developing global citizens who require specific modes of knowledge and skills to participate in the world economy and community (Pigozzi 2006; Grant and Portera 2010). Higher level writing and critical reading, which are academic literacy conventions, are among these skills. Often, the concepts “transformation” and “decoloniality” are applied synonymously. This is an erroneous conceptualization. Whereas the concept transformation may broadly be applied to any changes occurring in the higher education space (for example, increased application of e-Learning for pedagogic purposes), decoloniality refers to a specific concern and urge for change. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015, 485) describes the decolonial paradigm as an “epistemological movement aimed at liberation of (ex-) colonized peoples from global coloniality [and as] a way of thinking, knowing, and doing.” This conception diverges from generic approaches to “transformation” in educational contexts. Whereas decoloniality values resistance to “*hegemonic* [emphasis added] Euro-North American-centric intellectual thought and social theories” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015, 485), scholarship of generic pedagogic transformation does not necessarily hold those views; this includes scholars in South Africa, from where the current analysis emerges. For example, Du Preez, Simmonds, and Verhoef (2016), in highlighting trends of scholarly discussions surrounding transformation in South Africa’s tertiary education system, do not mention the concept of decoloniality. On the contrary, their study found emphases on the concept of “internationalization” in South African transformative reasoning (Du Preez, Simmonds, and Verhoef 2016, 2). In this analysis I do not conflate notions of transformation and decoloniality into a single analytical code. Instead, the aim of this article is to highlight how, in South Africa, there is an unresolved and methodological dualism between the concepts of decoloniality and global citizenship, as well as Africanization and internationalization.

Interrogating Global Citizen Paradigms from within a Decolonial Framework

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Academic literacy course developers in South African universities are currently confronted by petitions of decolonial and global citizenship education (GCE) ideologies. While those of a decolonial orientation seek the embedding of African epistemologies and knowledge of indigenous African systems of organization in the curriculum (Eybers 2019; Kumalo 2018), GCE scholars argue that literacy practices should enable increased student awareness of their membership as global citizens (Andreotti 2014). The stance of this study is that such interrogation is necessary if the discipline of academic literacy is to contribute meaningfully toward the emergence of a more socially just African continent and world (Rambiritch 2018). After all, Africa's relationship with the rest of globe, including the Global North, was shaped by colonial rule, settler colonization, and enslavement of millions of its people in new European colonies, including those of the Americas (Magubane 2004). While the GCE model aims to inculcate in students an increased consciousness of their relationships with people, cultures, and modes of organization beyond their national borders, it is critical to recall that historically, Africans cannot do so without acknowledging that their relationships with much of the globe has been characterized by exploitation, inequality, under-development, and global racism (Rodney, Babu, and Harding 1981). As a result of centuries of subjugation of African people, either as slaves in the colonies or as sources of cheap labor in settler structures, Western nations gained immense wealth. Internally, Africa is divided into nation-states where Afrophobia and xenophobia are realities (Oloruntoba 2018; Angu 2019). As Africans we continue to perceive each other as foreigners even though we share similar histories and socioeconomic challenges across the continent. While Africa constitutes a singular geographical entity, in many ways she remains divided by political borders as well as cultural and linguistic diversity, which have not been harnessed by post-independence leaders to end poverty and under-development. Africa remains the poorest continent and her people are the most impoverished (Oluwatayo and Ojo 2016). A global citizen paradigm, in South African and African contexts, should therefore enable the incorporation and engagement of socioeconomic challenges that are peculiar to African contexts. Academic literacy curriculum designers are equally responsible for engaging students in such interdisciplinary rhetoric and dialogue.

Literature Review

Academic Literacy and Decoloniality

The academic literacy field continues to fulfil a critical function in the South African higher education landscape. This is because a significant proportion of students, especially first-years, require backing in adjusting to the rigor that writing, reading, and other modes of literacies entail in tertiary spaces (Boakye 2015). My stance is that by virtue of their nature as discursive constructs, academic literacy curricula can jointly accommodate theories of decoloniality and GCE. However, in South Africa's context, there appears to be ambiguity as to *how* academic literacy curricula designers should explicitly incorporate decolonial and GCE principles into learning experiences. Adopting decolonial principles into contemporary curricula necessitates recognition that English was utilized as a discursive tool to advance colonial and apartheid economic projects (Pennycook 1998). Pennycook (1998) argues that colonial discourses may be genealogically mapped and traced to their perpetuation in the present. Therefore, some African scholars and students in South Africa are coerced into a state of intellectual rebellion against neo-colonial tendencies and agency in academic literacy departments and universities. Scholars have also theoretically linked decoloniality with the need to diversify teaching and learning languages (Christie and McKinney 2017). Translinguists, for example, claim that their methodology has the potential to challenge the hegemony or privileges of dominant languages in universities (Cushman 2016). In South Africa, the nation's nine non-European-inherited languages are predominantly non-existent in lecture halls and mainstream curricula. If languages are approached as cultural and learning tools, then Pennycook's (1998) construct of English as an enabler of colonial discourses is plausible. By privileging it in academic literacy development

and by marginalizing our indigenous African languages in the classroom, we are perpetuating linguistic imperialism in higher education. This linguistic regime structures universities as cultural spaces in which students either belong to the in-group of first-language English speakers or the out-group, in which English is an additional language to the students' home and other tongues (Chisango and Mayekiso 2014). Theories of sociocultural linguistics equally highlight how it is impossible to divorce the decolonial project from curricula that teach or assess students' application of discursive practices. Gee (2015, 1) defines a Discourse (with a capital "D") as "the ways in which people enact and recognise socially and historically significant identities or 'kinds of people' through...combinations of language, actions, interactions, objects, tools, technologies, beliefs, and values."

Gee's (2015) conception of Discourses is applicable to the analysis of how decolonial concerns may be approached or addressed in the academic literacy sphere. This is because as Discourses embody the identities of those who employ them, decoloniality necessitates that the identities of students are embedded in the curriculum and associated pedagogic practices. Here, consideration is given to all students in Africa who emerge from diverse ethnic or sociolinguistic collectives.

Academic Literacy and Global Citizenship Education

As with the interplay between academic literacy curricula and decoloniality, few studies have explicitly interrogated the potential of enhancing student development by incorporating principles of global citizenship education (GCE) into the curriculum. Banks (2004) argues that pedagogic endeavors in the GCE domain should equip students with skills that are necessary in the global domain. These include critical thinking, social action for problem solving, and intergroup communicative competencies (Banks 2004). Such skills are necessary as borders, immigration, and cross-cultural interactions are increasing in the world. However, when the above skills are contextualized in Africa from an academic literacy perspective, they take on geopolitical meanings. Africa's problems are immense and often emerge due to insufficient internal communication among Africans or their inability to do so in ways that arrest the continent's poverty and unemployment crises (Obonyo 2011). While academic literacy modules are not expected to solve all of Africa's challenges, they do provide learning environments which may aid in increasing students' consciousness of how modes of communication, literacies and interactions are necessary for the continent to network and improve its socioeconomic conditions (Obonyo 2011).

Curriculum designers who aim to apply principles of GCE in academic literacy curricula should also consider the inequalities which economic globalization has generated (Veneziani and Yoshihara 2017). While it is undeniable that the world has become smaller and more integrated due to economic expansion and technological innovation, this has not occurred in a manner whereby wealth is equally distributed to all peoples and nations. Economic disparities between the Global North and South persist. Economically, Africa is still one of the poorest continents in the world (Oluwatayo and Ojo 2016, 2018). Owing to these pressing realities, it is critical that the embedding of global citizenship principles in academic literacy curricula considers these inequalities and the implications which they have for the needs and aims of all African students and people of the African continent.

Discussion

Implementing a curriculum in the academic literacy domain that draws on decolonial and global citizenship theories is possible in the South African and African context. However, doing so requires sensitivity as South Africa has only recently emerged from a pre-democratic era and is still grappling with polarizing issues involving class, race, and economic inequality. Owing to this sensitivity, curricula designers must select and apply a model that is compatible with their discipline of study and the local contexts of their institutions. For the purposes of this discussion, I advocate what I term a social realist curricula model (see Figure 1 below). This model, which is

ontologically rooted in Archer's (1995) realist paradigm, aims to generate learning experiences by incorporating and drawing on content, agency, and culture, which are embedded in university structures, including academic departments. The culture, agency, and geographical origins of students are equally sought in a social realist curriculum.

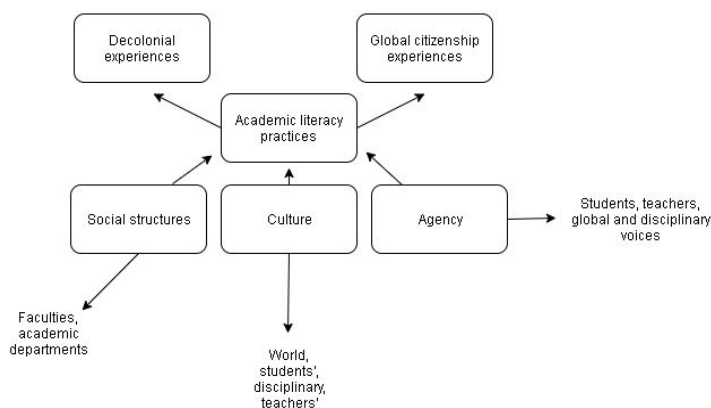


Figure 1: Social Realist Curriculum
Source: Eybers

Decoloniality and Students' Needs

Decolonial scholars argue that contemporary curricula in South African universities do not adequately incorporate the personal and community epistemologies that students bring to the learning experience. This is especially so for students who speak one of South Africa's official languages other than English. From Chilisa's (2012) perspective, the colonial and post-colonial eras saw Africans lose their cultural presence in tertiary-level curricula. The linguistic manifestation of this theory is that African languages and their epistemic roots, including Afrikaans, are currently afforded secondary status after English. In reference to Scheurich and Young's (1997) theory, Chilisa (2012) argues that dominant epistemologies in our universities mirror and buttress the hegemony of Western thought in Africa. The effect of this cultural morphostasis (or cultural stagnation) is that African students experience micro-aggression, epistemic exclusion, and institutional racism when universities should be guiding them to meet their academic goals in ways that draw on the essence of their being and identities (Archer 1995; Le Grange 2016). Shizha (2005) suggests that an un-decolonized curriculum stunts the ability of some students to critically interpret and develop their own academic texts. The concern highlighted is that in being culturally alienated from the curriculum, students' learning is constrained. In the African context, coloniality entails abjection or an epistemic process of casting off or making invisible the need of African people to see themselves and their cultures in the curriculum (Kumalo 2018). The impact of the academic literacy curriculum on students' self-perception, esteem, and belonging in the contemporary university is therefore a central concern in the decolonial paradigm. Hamachek (1995) argues that academic self-concept correlates highly with academic achievement. Indeed, numerous studies in South Africa evidence how low self-esteem among students is associated with suicidal tendencies and substance abuse (Wild et al. 2004). Seabi (2011) argues that low self-esteem is noticeable among students who have trouble with intellectual functioning. If, due to sole engagement of Western epistemologies in mainstream modules through academic literacy practices, students are constrained in cultivating positive self-concepts and a strong sense of self-esteem as they navigate the curriculum, then Kumalo's (2018) theorization of African abjection in our curricula is warranted. Indirectly, we are telling students to leave their identities and epistemic associations outside of the lecture hall as if these are not active throughout students' engagements with the curriculum and academic literacy experiences.

Epistemic Presence

The decolonial paradigm holds that to address students' needs to manifest and cultivate their self-concepts in the curriculum, it is necessary to enable their epistemic presence. Curricula that are void of content and do not generate pedagogic methods or assessment practices that draw on students' personal epistemologies are undesirable in this framework as they stunt the development of self-conception (Shizha 2005). Personal epistemologies are critical beliefs related to students' identities that shape their ideas about knowledge and knowledge production. In Angu (2018), the voices of students as emerging from their narratives reveal how their identities are significantly shaped by their pre-tertiary experiences. While some emerge from homes and communities where Western epistemologies are the norm, others emerge from environments where the active epistemology is one which varies from traditional expression of knowledge or argumentation in higher education. Angu (2018) bemoans the minimalist approach that South African practitioners of higher learning adopt in incorporating the richness that students' cultures bring to our academies. This, in his view, equates to epistemic marginalization or silencing. It is therefore vital to recognize that students' epistemologies are shaped by multiple and diverse social variables, including those which are active in the pre-tertiary phases of their development. Structurally, these variables include their families, schools and geographical communities of origin.

Global Citizenship Education and Students' Needs

As with the decolonial paradigm, it is necessary to interrogate the capacity of GCE principles to effectively incorporate and enhance the self-concept of all African learners. Goren and Yemini (2017) highlight that multiple nations, including the United States, China, South Korea, and some European states, are adopting curricula strategies to develop a global outlook among students. Such curricula strategies are structured around two models. These are the global competencies and the global consciousness models (Goren and Yemini 2017). While the first model aims to develop skills that are viewed as required in the global economy and community, the second aims to inculcate "global orientation, empathy [and] cultural sensitivity stemming from humanistic values" (Goren and Yemini 2017, 171). When juxtaposed with students' academic literacy needs, the GCE methodology has immense value and relevance. This is because, as also emerging from the decolonial paradigm, curricula should generate learning experiences that connect students to the broader global community via academic literacy practices.

As social constructs, academic literacy curricula are enabling platforms for introducing students to principles, attitudes and discourses associated with global citizenship. As Gee (2015, 1) claims, Discourses (with a capital "D") "capture the ways in which people enact and recognise socially and historically significant identities." Therefore, whether it is through reading, writing, or developing group or multimodal presentations, practices associated with academic literacy introduce students to multiple Discourses (Boakye 2017). These Discourses include those which emerge from the global community. While all curriculum designers and teachers in the academic literacy sphere may not be able to take students on international trips, by enabling their participation in Discourses of an international nature, possibly through reading, writing, and discussion, students may further develop their consciousness of how these Discourses are also active on the world stage and specifically in domains associated with their degrees and career choices. The application of global Discourses in the curriculum may enable, albeit in local contexts, an increase in students' consciousness of trends and interactions that relate to their disciplines of study in the global sphere (Robertson 2003). Through the application of academic literacy practices, students may possibly learn how to apply or further develop these Discourses in local environments for the benefit of the African continent.

Conclusion

Theories of decoloniality and global citizenship education are co-applicable in an academic literacy curriculum. They need not be approached as ideological foes. Whereas the former highlight principles and values from the pre-colonial era and African traditions that are still relevant to epistemic practices in higher education today, the latter coerce curriculum designers to look forward to the future of the continent and its interactions with the rest of the world. A theory of global citizenship education, while acknowledging that within and between nations there are persisting inequalities, can aid in the conceptualization and implementation of academic literacy learning experiences that expose students to events, trends, and developments in the global sphere. As they are often associated with disciplinary fields, academic literacy curricula may be internationalized through content incorporation of a global nature and assessment strategies that draw on phenomena from beyond Africa's borders. Because academic literacy is a social construct, it draws on values and principles embedded in the cultural contexts in which it operates (Lea and Street 2006). Decolonial theories challenge curriculum designers to consider Africa's unique and historical epistemic traditions, while a global outlook reminds us that falling behind the rest of the world in terms of technological development and being disconnected can be countered in the academic literacy curriculum. Therefore, if curriculum designers draw on principles and practices affiliated with both decoloniality and global education citizenship, the potential exists for students to develop their academic literacy-based skills in a holistic and epistemically diverse learning environment. While the global education sphere enables growth of their identities as international citizens, the decolonial domain challenges them to critically introspect on inequalities and persistent challenges, which, perhaps, through their disciplines of studies, may be reduced or eliminated.

Recommendation for Future Studies

This article is the first part of a project which aims to gauge the effectiveness of a decolonized and globally focused academic literacy curriculum. Its follow-up will empirically highlight students' experiences and responses to being exposed to academic literacy practices that are framed by decolonial, African-centered, and GCE principles. However, scholars in South Africa and around the globe who are interested in the potential impact of such a curricula framework in the classroom should consider the efficacy of variables such as geographic locale, culture, gender, race, and class on students' attitudes and interpretations of decolonial and globally-framed curricula experiences. This is because in a nation such as South Africa, there is a significant proportion of students who are first-generation university entrants. Many of these scholars emerge from working class families and have never crossed South Africa's borders or visited a Western nation. When contrasted with the origins of students from more privileged families, these social distinctions should be considered in how students approach the decolonized and global worlds. Again, this is a sensitive process, and students and lecturers may experience discomfort. Future researchers of intersections between decolonial and global education paradigms in the academic literacy curriculum should therefore also consider how the personal agency and cultures of lecturers and students interplay with the structure of the new curriculum. Lastly, future research should also probe how different teaching and assessment methods may draw on principles associated with decoloniality and globalization.

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