Decolonizing the Curriculum: A Case Study of the Humanities Faculty at Rhodes University

A half thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by
Nigel Machiha
g18M7756

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR SALLY MATTHEWS
2024

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to the completion of this thesis. My deepest appreciation goes to my supervisor Professor Sally Matthews for their guidance, support, and invaluable insights for both my Honours and Master's research projects. I am grateful to the Rhodes University Political and International Studies Department and its lecturers for contributing to my academic development. I am also thankful for the support and encouragement from my family and friends who stood by me during this academic journey. Additionally, I want to acknowledge the contributions of the participants, R.R Pillay, Anna Talbot-Kinsler, the Rhodes University Community Engagement Division and everyone who played a role, directly or indirectly, in the realization of this research. Your support has been instrumental, and I am truly grateful for the collaborative efforts that made this thesis possible.

Abstract

This thesis explores students' experiences in the Faculty of Humanities at Rhodes University, specifically focusing on their perspectives on decolonization. The thesis has two central aims: first, to investigate the students' general understanding of decolonizing the curriculum and second, to examine their experiences within the Humanities Faculty and their perception of how decolonized the faculty is. Through in-depth interviews with students in the faculty, the study aimed to answer questions regarding students' thoughts on the decolonization of university curricula and their experiences within the Faculty of Humanities at Rhodes University. The findings reveal diverse student views on decolonization, with definitions of decolonization provided by students touching on topics such as the Africanization or Indigenization of the curriculum, systemic transformation, the importance of unlearning colonial ideologies and the relationship between language and decolonization. The students' perceptions of the level of decolonization they witness in the faculty are categorized along three lines: the views of those who believe the departments they interact with are decolonized, the views of those who think efforts are being made but more progress is needed, and those who see no evidence of decolonization. The thesis highlights that while some students believe that positive steps towards decolonization are being taken, others express scepticism and call for a more diverse representation of scholars and scholarship and a departure from traditional Eurocentric approaches.

Keywords: Africanization, Curriculum, Decolonization, Epistemological access, Higher education, Indigenization, Language barriers, Rhodes University, Systemic transformation, Unlearning.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

1.1 The Context of the Study

This thesis analyzes how students in the Humanities Faculty at Rhodes University view the notion of decolonizing the curriculum, as well as how students within this faculty currently experience the curriculum. The thesis is situated in the aftermath of nationwide student protests in 2015 and 2016 that called for the transformation and decolonization of higher education. Some institutions responded to these protests by establishing task teams and curriculum transformation committees tasked with exploring how the curriculum could be decolonized (Le Grange et al., 2020: 26).

The protests of 2015/16 compelled universities across the country, especially historically white universities such as Rhodes University, to find ways in which they could decolonize higher education. Rhodes University put forward plans to decolonize with the publication of the "Rhodes University Institutional Transformation Plan 2019-2022" (RUITP). The plans set out in this document were constructed based on the recommendations that were made during the 2017 Rhodes University transformation summit process (Rhodes University, 2018: 3). This document defines the decolonization process as a process whereby knowledge and ideologies produced in the Global North are removed from the centre of the curriculum. This involves the reorientation of the curriculum towards the place where it is developed and facilitated. According to Rhodes University (2018:8), the decolonization of the curriculum entails a shift whereby people in the Global South become producers of knowledge rather than being limited to being consumers of knowledge produced in the North. According to the University, decolonization also includes the promotion of indigenous languages for teaching, learning, and research alongside English (Rhodes University, 2018: 8).

According to Chika Sehoole and Kolawole Samuel Adeyemo (2016: 7), a significant number of black students do not succeed in completing their university education. There are various reasons for this, with both physical and epistemological barriers playing a role. These issues range from being unable to afford the university fees and lacking the language and educational background to meaningfully engage with the content that the student is meant to learn (Sehoole and Adeyemo, 2016: 16). Although there have been significant changes in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa and access to university has been broadened, more needs to be done to ensure that students who have physical access to higher education also have

epistemological access such that they are able to participate meaningfully in higher education (Morrow, 2007).

1.2 Rhodes University – the Site of the Study

Rhodes University is a higher education institution located in the Eastern Cape province in South Africa. The university is one of the oldest institutions of higher learning in South Africa and was established in 1904. Rhodes University can be classified as a historically white institution (HWU), meaning that historically, it was reserved principally for the white minority, to the exclusion of the majority black South African population. Since 1994, there have been significant changes in improving the racial demographics at Rhodes University. The Rhodes University 2023 Digest of Statistics (which is based on the 2022 enrolment) reveals that 82% of Rhodes University students were African, 6% were coloured, 9% were white and 3% were Indian (Rhodes University, 2023:12). However, a change in racial demographics does not necessarily mean that the space itself has become transformed, deracialized and decolonized. In order for this space to transcend the effects of its history, several steps need to be taken to ensure that the past is addressed.

Rhodes University is one of the institutions that attempted to address calls for decolonization. In a document titled "Proposal for Curriculum Review at Rhodes University", which was published in 2016, it is stated that: "In the last twelve months, Rhodes University has experienced calls for curriculum review from students and many members of the academic staff" (Rhodes University, 2016). This statement shows that the proposal and the process that was introduced were influenced by the 2015/16 protests, which were calling for the institution to be decolonized and transform higher education learning in South Africa. In a document published in 2018, it is stated that the last time a university-wide curriculum review had taken place was in 2004 (Rhodes University, 2018).

The stance taken by Rhodes when it comes to the curriculum is that it should become decolonized, and that each department should review the curriculum at least every three years (Rhodes University, 2018). During the summit that was held in 2017, decolonization was defined as the removing of knowledge and world views (ideologies) produced in the Global North from the centre of the curriculum. This process would involve the reorienting of the curriculum towards the place where it is developed and facilitated. In this instance, to decolonize the curriculum, would be to recentre it to the extent to which it becomes reflective of its context.

In the Rhodes University Institutional Transformation Plan (RUITP), it is stated that in order to decolonize the Rhodes University curriculum, Africans and other people from the Global South must be situated and positioned as the subjects and not objects of knowledge (Rhodes University, 2018: 8). Another aspect that is touched on in the RUITP document is language. The document states that the process of decolonization also involves the promotion of the use of indigenous South African languages, alongside English, as languages of teaching, learning and research (Rhodes University, 2018: 8).

This study will focus on the Faculty of Humanities, the largest faculty at Rhodes. It is comprised of eleven academic departments, two schools and ten affiliated institutes, centres and units. In 2022, from the 8348 registered Rhodes University students, 3388 were students from the Humanities Faculty, this means that 41% of registered students were from this faculty (Rhodes University, 2023: 24).

1.3 Research Objectives

This thesis sets out to analyze decolonial efforts in the Humanities Faculty at Rhodes University from the perspectives of students. The study was conducted with the aim of identifying how students experience learning in the Humanities Faculty, as well finding out how they view the topic of decolonization. Two key themes are explored. Firstly, I look at how students perceive the notion of decolonizing the curriculum, with a focus on exploring their definitions and how these relate to the key literature that has been written on decolonizing the curriculum. Secondly, I look at how students experience learning within the Humanities Faculty. With a specific focus on epistemological access, this second theme seeks to evaluate the type of access obtained by the interviewed students within the Humanities Faculty and how this relates to the overall topic of decolonizing the curriculum.

In order to achieve the objectives of this research, this thesis will ask the following questions.

- What do Humanities students think about the decolonization of university curricula and how do they experience the Humanities curriculum at Rhodes University?
- What lessons can be drawn from the students' experiences in terms of better understanding what it means to decolonize higher education?

1.4 Research Design and Methodology

This study is a qualitative case study focusing on the Humanities Faculty at Rhodes University. Case studies are in-depth examinations of people or groups of people. A case study can also be used to study an institution such as Rhodes University. This approach, according to Crowe et al. (2011: 2), is useful in instances where "there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest in its natural real-life context". A case study can be used to explain, describe or explore phenomena or events in their everyday contexts (Yin, 2014). This thesis sought to provide an in-depth analysis of the perspectives and experiences of students with the decolonization of the curriculum.

The student participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling, which is a sampling method in which the subjects are purposefully selected based on desired characteristics (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999:51). The required characteristic for the participants was that they needed to be in the Humanities Faculty. Both undergraduate and post-graduate students were interviewed. A total of fourteen interviews were conducted, consisting of undergraduate and postgraduate students within the Humanities Faculty. Ethical approval was secured from the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU-HREC), prior to conducting interviews, ensuring adherence to research guidelines and safeguarding participant welfare.

I cannot confidently claim that the interviewed participants' views are representative of the student body in the Humanities. However, I did ensure that students from ten different departments were interviewed to ensure that views from across the faculty were represented. The participants included students studying the following subjects: Sociology, History, Political and International Studies, Legal Theory, Journalism and Media Studies, Psychology, Fine Arts, Drama, History, French, and Music. Although it was not the focus of the study, it is important to provide a brief statement which outlines the demographics of the students interviewed, as this will help provide context to some of the responses given by students during the interview process. Firstly, all the students who were interviewed, are black [African], furthermore twelve of the fourteen students are female, one is non-binary, and one is male. Although they were enrolled in an English medium university, all the students interviewed indicated that English was not their home language. Lastly, twelve of the fourteen students are South African, and two are international students.

The students were interviewed using in-depth interviews. This interviewing technique is a qualitative technique in which individuals are interviewed in order to explore their perspectives on a particular idea. This technique is useful when the researcher wants detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviours or wants to explore new issues in depth (Boyce and Neale, 2006: 3). In an in-depth interview, the participants provide the researcher with information, which usually happens in a form of verbal interaction or conversation. According to Bogdan & Biklen (1982:15), an interview can be defined as "a purposeful conversation usually between two people that is directed by one in order to get information". I chose in-depth interviews as the data gathering method because of the open-ended nature of this form of data gathering, which would allow the participants to freely express themselves and provide me, the researcher, with the space to fully explore my research topic in depth.

To understand students' experiences concerning the curriculum within the Humanities Faculty, I used thematic analysis as the primary method of data analysis. The thematic analysis method is often used within social sciences to understand the underlying meanings found in textual or visual data. This is done in a process which involves the analysis of qualitative data. Dawadi (2020: 62) defines thematic analysis as a qualitative research method used to organise and analyze complex data sets systemically. This data analysis process searches for themes that capture the narratives in the data collected. This process involves the identification of pieces, which is done by carefully reading and re-reading the transcribed data (Dawadi, 2020:62). In this instance, I began by reading the interview transcriptions to identify patterns and uncover recurring themes.

1.5 Chapter Outline of the Study

This study is organized into four chapters. This first chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study, encompassing key elements such as background, rationale, research problem, objectives, and questions.

Chapter Two reviews literature on decolonizing the curriculum, coloniality, colonialism, decolonialization, decoloniality, and epistemological access.

Chapter Three focused on data analysis and interpretation. I look at the data that was gathered from the research that was conducted. Throughout this chapter, I present the data and link it to the relevant literature.

Chapter Four focuses on discussing the research findings and providing conclusions and recommendations. In this chapter, I summarize the research findings and align them with the research objectives. This chapter will serve as the concluding chapter of the thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter situated the study in relation to current debates about decolonizing higher education. The chapter is informed by decolonial theory, which reflects on and seeks to address the effects of colonialism on the colonized. I will begin with a brief section on how the curriculum and higher education in the South African context became colonized. This is followed by a section distinguishing between colonialism and coloniality. Once this is done, I will review literature that has attempted to theorize what a decolonized curriculum would look like. The thesis will be informed by the works of scholars such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2006), Walter Mignolo (2011), Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), Lesley Le Grange (2016), Jonathan Jansen (2017), Valentin Yves Mudimbe (1994), Olufemi Taiwo (2022), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1996), Frantz Fanon (1983), and Ramon Grosfoguel (2007) who provide theoretically rich discussions on decolonizing higher education. I will be engaging with the various scholars who have written on this topic, whilst also touching on concepts such as transformation, Africanization and the notion of coloniality. The key focus of this will be to review the literature pertaining to decolonizing the curriculum.

2.1 Colonialism and Education

According to Mignolo (2011), the colonization of land and the colonial expansion of Europeans on the African continent also entailed the expansion of Eurocentric forms of knowledge. One of the key tools used by the colonialists to maintain power and subjugate people was colonial education. Çağrı Mart and Alpaslan Toker (2010: 362) argue that colonial education was grounded in the belief that the white race of Europe was "superior" and should, therefore ", civilize" the people of colour who were from the "dark continent" as they were "less developed". The authors further state that colonial education was used as a deliberate policy to continue colonial rule (Çağrı Mart and Alpaslan Toker, 2010:362). Mart and Toker (2010: 362) argue that the language and education of the colonial powers became associated with sophistication, modernity and social status. Colonialism led the colonized to lose their epistemology and ontology and adopt those of the colonizers. What this essentially means is that colonialism contributed to the destruction and overall devaluation of indigenous knowledge systems from the African continent. Lebeloane (2017: 2) argues that these colonized people lost their expertise to create and interpret knowledge. Similarly, Fairchild

(1994:192) argues that a central aspect of the oppression of the native people is their dehumanization and the attempt to destroy their national culture.

As seen in the work of Frantz Fanon (1963: 15), colonialism goes beyond just the physical aspect of domination. It also involves the destruction of the colonized people's history in order to make the colonizer's history that of the colonized. This, in turn, affects the colonized people's language, culture, names and history. Fanon believed that the use of language that degrades the natives to the status of animals, as well as the concentrated attacks on indigenous cultural practice and the application of racist "scientific" theories, were some of the keyways in which the colonizers were able to oppress and dehumanize the colonized subjects (Fanon. 2001:33). In his book titled *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argued that decolonization is an inherently violent process due to the relationship between the colonized and colonizer being one of binary opposites. According to Fanon (1983:51), "when the native is confronted with the colonial order of things, he finds he is in a state of permanent tension". What the author means by this is that settler colonialism and colonial rule create tension among those who are colonized. What often occurs is that the colonizers themselves create and facilitate the conditions in which the tension is created within the natives. This tension eventually becomes the catalyst for the violence used by the colonized against the colonizer (Fanon, 1983: 52).

According to Mudimbe (1988:15), colonialism entailed three projects, these being "the domination of physical space, the reformation of natives' minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective". Together, these projects comprise what is known as the colonial structure, which, from Mudimbe's perspective, "completely embraces the physical, human and spiritual aspects of the colonising experience" (1988:15).

Odora-Hoppers and Richards (2011) distinguish between first- and second-generation colonialism and state that first-generation colonialism refers to the initial stage of colonization in which European states physically invaded and occupied foreign lands. In this "first generation" colonialism, European powers, often with the use of violence and force, exerted both indirect and direct forms of control and rule on the colonized indigenous populations, who were exploited and subjugated in the process (Odora-Hoppers and Richards, 2011:7). Second generation colonialism was the colonialism through disciplines such as science education, law and economics (Le Grange, 2016: 4; Odora-Hoppers and Richards 2011). Lebeloane (2017:2) provides more information on second-generation colonialism, saying that this generation of

colonialism was more subtle and involved the colonization of the mind through various means, with the aim of reshaping people's worldviews, values and institutions.

The effects of colonialism on colonized states are still visible today because "the underlying structures of oppression and injustice remain the same" (Sardar, 2008: 18). Le Grange et al. (2020: 28) argue that obtaining independence does not mean that colonialism has ended. This is because the effects of colonialism usually remain long after these countries obtain their independence. As in the works of the authors in Arday, *et.al* (2020), "colonialism, apartheid and other vehicles for entrenching white supremacy did not only affect political rights or economic freedoms". This is because colonialism affected every aspect of life, and its effects and legacies are still entrenched in South Africa (Heleta, 2016: 2).

In the South African context, one key example of executing colonial education came through the ruling system known as Apartheid. It can be argued that the Apartheid government used education as one of its tools for subjugation. What can be seen is that colonial education was often used by colonial powers not only as a tool for subjugation but also as a way of reinforcing notions of racial superiority. The term Apartheid itself directly translates to "separateness", which is essentially how the government ruled the country (Seekings and Nattrass, 2005: 18). Apartheid created a racial hierarchy in which disadvantages or benefits were granted depending on the colour of a person's skin. The key beneficiaries in this racial hierarchy were the white minority, at the expense of the majority of the population who were not white and who were treated and viewed as subjects.

A key example of this subjugation is the implementation of Bantu Education and the passing of laws which barred black people from attending institutions of learning that were designated for the white population. Maria Lizet Ocampo (2004: 1) states that Bantu Education did not properly equip the majority to enter higher education in South Africa. She further states that this racially motivated educational system, which the Apartheid government implemented through the Bantu Education Act of 1952, ensured that the black majority received an education that limited their educational potential and that they remained in the working class (Ocampo, 2004:1). Albertus and Tong (2019: 2) states that the Bantu education policy determined the content and level of education with the aim of institutionalizing racial inequalities by preventing access to higher education and entry into occupations requiring more than basic skills. Hendrik Verwoerd, who is often viewed as the architect of Bantu education, said that

“There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour … What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice?” (cited in Basebenzi, 2019). This attitude meant that it was significantly more difficult for black people to obtain the kind of education that allowed them to continue to higher education. However, even if they did, there were also racist restrictions which made it nearly impossible to enter white universities.

In 1959 and 1960, further laws were put in place to prevent “non-white” people from attending “white” universities (Reddy, 2004: 13). This was implemented to drive black student enrolment away from established white universities towards the newly created black institutions, which were severely under-resourced and qualitatively different from the white institutions (Reddy, 2004: 13). Motala et al. (2021: 1003) show how historically universities formed part of the Apartheid social engineering. These institutions were “racially segregated, differentially resourced, and invested with institutional orientations aimed at upholding white domination” (Rensburg, 2020). According to Lazar (1987:356), Apartheid government officials were against the idea of these black institutions being self-sufficient. This was one of the main reasons why they appointed their own staff, dictated the academic standards, prescribed the curriculum, and ensured that the government-supporting Afrikaners dominated administrative and academic positions (Davies, 1996: 322).

2.2 Colonialism and Coloniality

The previous section looked at how colonialism and apartheid shaped education and knowledge production. In this section I will be discussing the question of the difference between colonialism and coloniality.

As seen in the works of Ndlovu (2018), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) and Le Grange (2020), when speaking on decolonization, it is essential to distinguish between colonialism and coloniality. Ndlovu (2018: 97) defines coloniality as a vertical global power structure in which some people benefit from the privileges of modern society, while others are left to suffer from the negative impact of this structure. This modern society is centred around Western ideas and systems. Some of the negative consequences of this Western-centred global structure are slavery, colonialism, apartheid and neo-colonialism. According to Ndlovu (2018:97), these practices reveal that “coloniality has a longer history than colonialism, but also that it survives the latter”. What the is meant by the author in this instance is that coloniality is not just about historical

colonialism but also includes ongoing systems and processes that continue to perpetuate inequality and exploitation.

This view can be linked to that ofMignolo (2011:2), who argues that the basis of Western civilization is coloniality. Maldonado-Torres (2007: 243) states that coloniality and colonialism are different. The author argues that "colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire". The author further states that "coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 243). However, this does not mean that coloniality is merely the aftermath of colonialism. According to Maldonado-Torres (2006: 117), coloniality is kept alive in various aspects of independent states; this can be through books, cultural patterns, the self-image of people, and the criteria that are used to measure academic performance.

According to scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 179) and Nyamnjoh (2017), in the African context, institutions such as universities, schools, colleges, and churches are sites where various forms of coloniality are reproduced. Ndlovu (2018:110) argues that "coloniality of knowledge is a key lever in the structural system of colonial domination as a whole" .As seen in Motala et al. (2021: 1004), one of the ways in which coloniality is reproduced is university spaces, where coloniality is reproduced through their "endorsement, legitimation and valorization of particular forms of knowledge, pedagogy and practice". From the perspective of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019), the concepts of coloniality and decoloniality emerged from the Latin American "Modernity/Coloniality" project, which was promulgated by the works of influential scholars such as Anibal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, Ramon Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Maria Lugones. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019), "coloniality became identified as the constitutive underside of Euromodernity and decoloniality as a necessary liberation struggle aimed at freeing the world from global coloniality".

Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that the physical acts of colonization institute coloniality, which is a metaphysical process and an epistemic project that affects how colonized people think (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019). These people are affected so that what they know is destabilized to

the extent that what they come to know is only what was brought in by the colonialists (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019: 2). Through colonialism, crimes such as epistemicide, culturecide and linguicide are committed. Epistemicide involves the killing and displacing of pre-existing knowledges and linguicide refers to the killing and displacing of the languages of colonized people and these being replaced by those of the colonizer. Lastly, culturecide occurs when the cultures of people are killed or replaced by the colonizers (Omanga, 2020, Le Grange, 2023: 46). What Ndlovu-Gatsheni is essentially saying is that colonialism is a destabilizing process, that affects various aspects of the colonized people's lives, such as culture, language, and knowledge. This creates coloniality which persists and re-invents itself even when colonialism comes to an end.

2.3 Decolonization and Decoloniality

After discussing the distinction between coloniality and colonization, this section will be discussing the terms decoloniality and decolonization. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) as well as other scholars such as Mignolo (2011), Maldonado-Torres (2011) and Quijano (2000) have written on the notion on decoloniality, with each providing their own interpretation. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), states that "decoloniality is the long-standing political and epistemological movement which aims to liberate previously colonized people from global coloniality, ways of knowing thinking and doing". This can be linked to the definition provided by Maldonado-Torres (2011), who defines it as a term that refers to the "diverse efforts to resist the process of colonization, racialization, to enact transformation and redress in reference to the historical and ongoing effects of these processes, and to create and keep alive modes of knowing, being, and relating that these processes seek to eradicate".

Decolonial thinkers are inspired by Fanon's approach to decolonization. His work has inspired various leading contemporary scholars who write on the notion of decoloniality. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, argues in his work *Decolonizing the Mind* that it is "impossible to understand what informs African writing" without reading Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (wa Thiong, 2005: 86). From the perspective of Frantz Fanon (1967:13), individual liberation is a prerequisite for decolonization. The author further states that "any unilateral liberation is incomplete, and the gravest mistake would be to believe in their automatic interdependence" (Fanon, 1967:13). From Frantz Fanon's perspective what occurs within the colonial world is that two forces encounter each other, these forces being the colonial settler and the native population. Furthermore, this colonial world is sustained and defined by violence (Fanon, 2001:81). In this

instance colonial rule is imposed by the colonizer European states as a way to exploit the colonized states of their resources. Maldonado Torres (2007: 260), argues that from Fanon's perspective "decolonization should aspire at the very minimum to restore or create a reality where racialized subjects could give and receive freely in societies founded on the principle of receptive generosity". Institutions such as organized religion and the education system are used as means of upholding the hegemonic superstructure of colonialism. This can be linked to the work of Le Grange (2016) who argues that it is important to decolonize spaces such as universities, because these spaces represent a microcosm of society, which means that decolonizing them would allow for the beginning of broader transformation to take place in South Africa.

Mignolo (2011) believes that there is a need to address Western knowledge which played, and in some instances continues to play, an instrumental role in maintaining the "colonial matrix of power". According to the author, this is why "epistemic de-linking" needs to occur. This is said to be part of what Grosfoguel (2007: 211) calls the "decolonial turn", which is a shift in focus that draws attention to the need to epistemologically transcend the Western canon and epistemology. The author further states that the decolonization of knowledge is required, in which the epistemic perspective, cosmologies and insights of critical thinking from the "subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies" from the Global South are taken seriously (Grosfoguel, 2007: 212).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni often uses the term decolonization and decoloniality together (2019). From the author's perspective, to decolonize is to undo the effects of colonization and coloniality through what Ndlovu-Gatsheni refers to as epistemic decolonization. This is in line with Maldonado-Torres' (2007: 260) definition of what it means to decolonize – he refers to decolonization as referring to the undoing of the impact, effects, forms, and continuities of colonization. Kessi et al. (2020: 271) adopt a similar approach, defining decolonization as a "political and normative ethic practice of resistance and intentional undoing, unlearning and dismantling unjust practices, assumptions and institutions". Le Grange (2016:4) links the concept of decolonization to first and second-generation colonialism, saying that "decolonisation is a necessary response to first- and second-generation colonialism, neo-colonialism and the recent (re)ascendency of neoliberalism". From the perspective of Le Grange (2017), both first and second-generation colonialism led to denigration and decimation of indigenous knowledge. Likewise, the word "decolonization", according to Stein and

Andreotti (2016), is an umbrella term which refers to the different kinds of efforts implemented to resist and address the processes of racialization and colonization. The authors further state that the term decolonization also refers to transformation and redress in reference to "the historical and ongoing effects of these processes, and to create and keep alive modes of knowing, being, and relating that these processes seek to eradicate" (Stein and Andreotti, 2016: 978).

Similar to how authors such as Mudimbe (1988) and Odora-Hoppers and Richards (2011:7), believe that colonialism had different aspects and phases, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) argues that decolonization needs to be understood in its phases. Furthermore, the term and its meaning have had different meanings, which are influenced by the time period and location from which it is being used. A clear example is how "decolonization" was associated with national liberation movements in Asia and Africa in the twentieth century (Hargreaves, 1996:244). In this instance, the word decolonization was linked to critical issues pertaining to political self-determination and independence from the European colonial powers (Betts, 2012: 24). In more recent years, the term decolonization has increasingly been used in relation to cultural, political and academic movements which were influenced by various academic scholars from Latin America such as Ramon Grosfoguel and Walter Mignolo, as well as influential earlier scholars such as Franz Fanon, whose work has been cited by African scholars such as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

In summary, within academia, the term "decolonization" is being used today by decolonial scholars to analyse and address the ongoing effects of colonialism on African knowledge and knowledge production on the African continent during the post-independence era.

2.4 Decolonization in Higher Education

The decolonization of the curriculum falls within the broader topic of the decolonization of higher education. In this section of the literature review, I will be exploring work written on the evolving discourse surrounding the decolonization of higher education and examining the various perspectives and arguments that have evolved within the field of decolonial studies. This section will focus on briefly reviewing the literature that has been written about decolonizing higher education. In this section, I aim to discuss what exactly is meant by decolonizing higher education and to highlight the perspectives provided by key authors on what is needed for higher education to be decolonized.

Some scholars, such as Le Grange (2019), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019), and Motala et al. (2021), argue that institutions of higher learning are still grappling with the legacies of colonialism. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition that, in some instances, these institutions have become sites which maintain, reproduce and perpetuate not only colonialism but also systemic inequalities, the marginalization of diverse voices, and sustaining Eurocentric perspectives (Kaya and Seleti, 2013:34).

The call to decolonize higher education transcends calls for reform, challenging the foundations of knowledge production, power dynamics and representation within educational institutions. Scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), Mamdani, 2016 and Mignolo (2011) call for a fundamental reimagining and restructuring of societal institutions, including higher education, to address the underlying power imbalances and colonial legacies. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 1) argues that decolonization is a radical process that should involve the replacing of some Western knowledge in universities. Ndlovu-Gatsheni is sceptical of the broad-based approach of the decolonial project and believes that adopting this approach will lead to the project losing its revolutionary impetus (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019: 6). From Ndlovu-Gatsheni's perspective decolonization has to remain a revolutionary term that has both theoretical and practical value. This position can also be seen in the work of Motala et al. (2021: 1004), who state that "decolonization is more radical, concerned with a programme of epistemological, economic and political disruption of forms of coloniality that pervade both higher education and society".

The work of Le Grange et al. (2020: 30) is in line with this theme. In their journal article, the authors assess whether decolonizing the university curriculum is a feasible national project. This journal article aimed to assess whether there is enough evidence that significant revolutionary change is happening or whether the term "decolonization" has become a buzzword that these institutions use. The authors also found that in instances where hierarchical power relations operate in the form of a top-down approach, the decolonial project might become jeopardized, which can result in epistemic injustices. The authors argue that there is a danger that comes with institutional efforts to decolonize because the project may become co-opted and lose its revolutionary impulse. They further state that these efforts can potentially become exercises in decolonial washing, in which the term decolonization merely becomes a buzzword used in conjunction with more palatable initiatives such as curriculum transformation and curriculum renewal (Le Grange et al., 2020: 44).

According to Du Plessis (2021:54), in South Africa, the decolonization of universities is a process in which historically disadvantaged and marginalized people choose to recognize and embrace their own cultures, tell their own histories, and study from books written by African scholars. This is done to shift the focus of institutions away from Eurocentric values, with the aim of restructuring these institutions. This aligns with the works of decolonial scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni, who argue against Western dominance within knowledge production. Ndlovu-Gatsheni rejects the notion that European ways of knowing and thinking are superior to those produced by Africans and argues that decolonization is an ongoing process and that much more needs to be done to address the effects of colonialism on the African continent. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) share a view that Eurocentric epistemology was and continues to be used as a tool for the invasion of the African mental universe. Decolonial scholars reject the idea that European knowledge is the most superior form of knowledge. Mudimbe (1988:28) views this perspective as "epistemological ethnocentrism", the belief which occurred and still occurs when European scholars believe that nothing of importance and significance can be learned from non-Europeans. These European scholars who engaged in epistemological ethnocentrism were and still are of the view that there is little to learn from the African continent.

However, there are some scholars, such as Olufemi Taiwo (2022), who offer a different perspective on the notion of decolonization. Taiwo argues that "we should rid ourselves of decolonization" because "it is seriously harming scholarship in and on Africa" (Taiwo, 2022: 3). What the author is referring to in this instance, is what he defines as "Decolonisation$_2$" (as opposed to Decolonisation$_1$) (Taiwo, 2022). Taiwo (2022: 6) argues that the term decolonization is increasingly being used to refer to contemporary morality and authenticity. The key purpose of Taiwo's book, titled Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously, is to argue that the term decolonization has lost its meaning, and what needs to happen is that the applicability of the term should not be expanded beyond its original meaning. Taiwo (2022) is against the indiscriminate application of decolonization to anything supposedly related in some way to colonialism. Taiwo is not denying or minimizing the effects that colonialism had on the African continent but is against the notion that we should get rid of everything that can be linked to colonialism (Taiwo, 2022: 4). Taiwo is arguing against the contemporary use of the term decolonization, in which decolonization is presented as the key solution to all of Africa's problems, especially within African Academia.

2.5 The Curriculum

There are various perspectives on what exactly the "curriculum" entails. Le Grange (2016:8) argues that at the centre of any approach to decolonize the curriculum, must be the rethinking of the subject. Le Grange (2016) and Mheta (2018) are some of the authors who offer a perspective on decolonizing the curriculum in South African higher education. These authors highlighted three forms of curricula: the null, the explicit and the hidden curriculum. These can be linked to the work of Elliot Eisner (1985), who argued that all schools teach three curricula: the explicit, the implicit, and the null. According to Le Grange (2016: 7) and Flinders et al. (1986: 34), the explicit curriculum refers to the formal, documented, and planned aspects of the curriculum. These are the elements that are explicitly designed and provided to students and can include course outlines, syllabi, module frameworks, prescribed readings, assessment guidelines, and learning objectives. The hidden curriculum is what students learn about the dominant culture of a university and what values it reproduces. It encompasses the unspoken, implicit, and often unintentional lessons and values that students acquire through their educational experiences. It includes the cultural norms, values, and ideologies that are indirectly conveyed to students. The hidden curriculum can have a powerful influence on students' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Le Grange: 2016: 7). It shapes how students perceive the dominant culture within the educational institution. Le Grange (2016: 7) states that the null curriculum refers to what is not taught or addressed in the formal curriculum. These are the topics, perspectives, or experiences that are omitted or excluded from the educational program. The null curriculum is significant because it highlights the gaps or omissions in the education system (Le Grange, 2016: 7).

What can be concluded from the above literature is that the curriculum, in its various forms, plays a vital part in higher education. Therefore, care needs to be taken to ensure that it is responsive not only to its context but also to the needs of the students. Aoki (1991) highlights the importance of the curriculum, especially in the context of decolonizing higher education The author argues that it is essential to have a curriculum that is planned and taught; it should be structured in such a way that it can be taught as lived (curriculum-as-lived) to enable students to critique and decolonize it. This approach empowers students to actively engage with the curriculum and, when necessary, advocate for changes that promote a more inclusive educational experience.

2.6 Decolonizing the Curriculum

This thesis will draw its approach to the curriculum from that of the authors in Motala et al. (2021: 1004) "who understand curriculum in its broadest sense as reflecting the institutional context, support and care which characterize and frame the context in which learning takes place". From the perspective of these authors, the decolonization of the curriculum involves looking at various aspects of the curriculum, such as teaching and learning encounters. The central focus of this study will be looking at how students within the Humanities Faculty view the notion of decolonizing the curriculum, as well as their experiences learning within their departments. This study is similar in approach to that of Motala et al. (2021: 1004), who explore and interrogate issues such as "medium of instruction, and what and whose knowledge, ideas and values revalorized and embedded in the pedagogic encounter".

According to the authors in Le Grange et al. (2020: 29), the decolonization of the curriculum is a process that involves the decentring of Eurocentric epistemologies. To decolonize the curriculum, one should not seek to destroy Western knowledge, but rather to decentre it in such a way that it is placed on equal footing with other knowledges such as indigenous knowledge (Le Grange, 2016). Le Grange (2016), Du Preez and Ramrathan (2020), and Blignaut (2020) argue for the integration of both Western and African knowledge in the university curricula. From the perspectives of these authors, decolonizing the curriculum has to do with what knowledge and whose knowledge is being included in education programs and institutions of higher learning.

Drawing on Mudimbe's (1988) notion of epistemological ethnocentrism discussed earlier, Matthews (2018: 54) states that "it is this epistemological ethnocentrism that has resulted in the exclusion and undermining of so much African scholarship". What this essentially means is that these Western scholars, who are dominant within academia, not only help in maintaining the unequal hierarchal relationship within academia, but they also contribute to placing and keeping African knowledge in the periphery. What this means is that when thinking about decolonizing the curriculum, it is crucial for us to be thinking about the knowledge that is being consumed by students, as well as ensuring that African knowledge is adequately represented in the texts which are prescribed to the students (Matthews, 2018: 54). According to Heleta and Chasi (2024:85), it is important to dismantle Eurocentric hegemony, in knowledge and the curriculum. The authors further state that education and knowledge should be connected to the students' identities and backgrounds, considering their historical and current socio-economic,

political, and cultural contexts., and then looking from these perspectives outwards at the world.

The authors in Mheta et al. (2018) argue that decolonizing the curriculum does not mean we should seek to remove all forms of Western and Northern knowledge and replace it with African knowledge traditions, but rather that we should find ways of working with existing knowledge traditions in a manner that will make them more relevant to the African context. The authors believe that diversifying knowledge traditions can be used to develop and grow higher education in South Africa. Similarly, Motsa (2017: 34) states that merely removing Western knowledge and "Africanising" the curriculum does not necessarily mean that the space will become decolonized. This is why she suggests that the African syllabus should be taught parallel to and in comparison, with the colonial syllabus because this is one way in which we can foster the growth of local epistemologies.

Pett (2015) presents several key factors when it comes to decolonizing the curricula, one of these being the importance of re-teaching teachers and making literature by women and people of colour in literary studies mandatory. This view is similar to that of Jansen (2017: 5), who states that the people who teach the curriculum and what is taught play an important part in the process of decolonizing the curriculum. Similar to this, are the views of raised by students who were part of a knowledge-making project known as With Dreams in Our Hands (WDIOH), who argue that it is essential to have more black African lecturers, and lecturers who care about students (Knowles et al., 2023:7). Reflecting on this project, the authors argue that one beneficial way to enhance the learning experience for students is by having a lecturer who understands and acknowledges the experiences of students and who uses examples from contexts that are familiar to the students (Knowles et al., 2023:7).

2.7 Epistemological Access

Similar to the works of scholars such as Boughey (2010), Morrow (2007), Motala et al. (2021: 1004), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020), and Scott (2009), this thesis will be looking at the issues pertaining to epistemological access. Within the context of higher education, it can be argued that in the post-Apartheid context, the physical and legal barriers to access that prevented black students from accessing higher education were mostly removed. This meant that black students who historically were not allowed access to certain higher education institutions, such as Rhodes University, could now do so. However, as seen in the work of scholars such as Scott

(2009: 32), more than physical access to universities is needed as increased enrolments have historically not translated into equivalent student throughput. Brenden Gray (2017: 94) argues that institutions' curriculum reform initiatives are oriented around a liberal democratic notion of transformation. Within this framework, social justice provides equal opportunity and access. The question then becomes, what exactly does "access" entail? This is because a student can obtain different forms of access. This thesis will focus on two forms of access: physical and epistemological. These will be analysed with a focus on decolonizing the curriculum.

According to Boughey (2010: 230), there is a lack of consensus within the academic space as to what constitutes epistemological access. However, at the core of debates on this topic is the evaluation of the form of access that students obtain when it comes to higher education. One of the earliest authors to speak on epistemological access was Wally Morrow, who first used the term in 1992 in an article where he differentiated between two dimensions of access these being institutional access, which refers to formal access, and epistemological access, which speaks to accessing the knowledge that the institution distributes (Du Plooy and Zilindile, 2014: 194). Within university learning spaces, students are challenged to negotiate and access disciplinary knowledge. This access to disciplinary knowledge and the ways of knowing within a discipline is what Morrow (2009: 37) views as epistemological access.

From Morrow's perspective, a well-designed curriculum facilitates epistemological access, fosters academic development and promotes deep learning (Morrow, 2009: 13). Wally Morrow relates the issues with epistemological access to the dominance of an empiricist epistemology in education. Morrow argues that there is a need to find new ways of thinking about teaching in South Africa if we are to meet the challenge of enabling all learners to gain epistemological access (Lotz-Sisitka, 2009: 57). From Morrow's perspective, epistemological access is not something that can be bought, sold, or given to someone. He further states that it is not something that can be delivered or supplied to a student because it involves "learning how to become a successful participant in an academic practice" (Morrow, 2000: 77).

According to Davids (2019:3), there is a misplaced assumption that physical access (student registration), automatically translates into participation and internal inclusion. The author argues that historical exclusion cannot be rectified through the process of physical inclusion, that simply increases the number of students from historically advantaged backgrounds. From Davids' perspective, more attention needs to be focused on the identities and contexts of these

students, in order to ensure that they are able to gain access to the university space both externally (through being enrolled) and internally (through feeling included and having a voice).

Another angle is introduced by Graham and Slee (2008: 278), who argue that "there is an implicit centredness to the term inclusion, for it discursively privileges notions of the pre-existing by seeking to include the other into a prefabricated, naturalized space". Davids (2019: 4), argues that this is significant because, when these students enter these historically white institutions, in which they were historically prohibited to enter, they are brought into spaces that are shaped by pre-existing norms of supremacy and privilege, which do not automatically change because students from historically disadvantaged groups have been enrolled.

According to Maniram and Maistry (2018: 309), it is unlikely that a student with serious conceptual knowledge gaps would acquire epistemological access on their own. This is why, according to Boughey and Niven (2012: 642), it is important for higher education institutions to embrace academic practices that facilitate epistemological access. Morrow (2009: 75), states that we need to reexamine current practices with the aim of responding to the lived experiences of students, because this enables these students to acquire ways of knowing that promote academic success.

This can be linked to the point raised by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020:2), who argues that "If you remove colonialism physically without removing it epistemically, it will not disappear". This statement by Ndlovu-Gatsheni suggests that addressing the physical aspects of colonialism alone is not enough to eradicate it. Concerning knowledge and ways of thinking, this statement emphasizes the importance of tackling the underlying epistemic dimensions of colonialism. Decolonization means challenging all forms of coloniality that persist in higher education and are complicit in colonial oppression (Zembylas, 2018: 3). Zembylas (2018) explains that decolonizing higher education is "a political, social, and epistemic process and a project that implies a critical examination of dominant structures of knowledge and their power relationship". Colonialism profoundly affects how people think, perceive, and understand the world. Therefore, dismantling colonialism requires more than just changing political borders or structures; it involves challenging and transforming the underlying ideologies, beliefs, and knowledge systems shaped by colonial histories (Zembylas, 2018: 4).

Motala et al. (2021: 1004) argue that decolonization as an epistemic struggle is characterized by three key issues. The first concerns epistemic questions and looks at "what and whose knowledge is affirmed, prioritised, and legitimized" (Motala et al., 2021: 1004). The second issue focuses on material concerns such as economic deprivation and resourcing, which significantly contribute to how teaching and learning are shaped. The third is issues of the pedagogic act and encounter; these issues include the realization of care and support, which would enable epistemic access in higher education (Motala et al., 2021: 1004).

2.8 Language and the Curriculum

As seen in the works of Nyoni (2023:549), through colonialism and the apartheid state, English and Afrikaans, the two languages spoken by the white minority, were able to gain prominence over the use of Indigenous African languages. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues that the inadequately handled transformation and ambiguous outcomes regarding the adoption of Indigenous languages and mother tongues have perpetuated the colonial legacy. This situation has contributed to the persistence of certain negative aspects of coloniality, including issues related to knowledge, power, and the shaping of people's identities.

This is why language is a relevant discussion when it comes to decolonizing the curriculum in higher education. In this section, I will look at literature that speaks to the debates surrounding the relationship between language and the curriculum. Some of these debates are centred around questions on how language fits within the overall picture of decolonizing, with some of these discussions being centred around the relationship that black students have with language when attending historically white tertiary institutions.

According to Lumadi (2021:39), "language plays a prominent role in the development of personal, social and cultural identity". Students who possess a solid grounding in their home language often exhibit a more profound comprehension of their own identity and societal role, along with an elevated sense of well-being and self-assurance. According to Odora-Hoppers and Pinar (2017:9), this can positively impact various aspects of their lives, including academics.

Authors such as Wa Thiong'o (1994), Mbembe (2015), and Mheta et al. (2018: 4), emphasize the need to have African languages at the centre of the African universities. Mbembe (2015:17) argues that "a decolonised university in Africa should put African languages at the centre of its teaching and learning project". Furthermore, the authors in Mheta et al. (2018:4) state that

decolonization is not about closing the door to Western and Northern traditions. It is about making "African knowledge the centre in relation to other knowledge traditions, which are all encapsulated in different languages". In this instance, what the authors argue is not that we should only focus on having African languages and getting rid of Western ones, but rather that we should bring African languages away from the periphery and into the centre, as this will foster the creation of an environment in which decolonization can take place (Ngugi,1992, Mbembe, 2015; Mheta et al., 2018).

According to Saunders (2017), decolonizing the curriculum involves incorporating principles of liberation and equality throughout higher education. This includes altering course content, adjusting the language of instruction if it disproportionately benefits a minority over the majority, changing instructional methods, updating assessment approaches, reforming research and publication practices, providing support for training, resources, and funding, and adapting recruitment criteria (UNESCO 2003:108). A curriculum that undergoes decolonization would offer diverse perspectives on subjects, promote critical thinking, and stimulate discussions, addressing issues vital to marginalized groups in our community that are often overlooked in the educational system (Lumadi, 2021:38).

As outlined in the Rhodes University Institutional Transformation Plan, in line with the goal of decolonization of higher education, the use of African languages alongside English should be promoted. The document states that the process of decolonization also involves the promotion of the use of indigenous South African languages alongside English as languages of teaching, learning and research (Rhodes University, 2018: 8). This was not the first time that Rhodes University had outlined this as one of their objectives, as the university had earlier stated that one of the objectives of the institution's language policy is to advance the academic viability and status of isiXhosa (Rhodes University, 2019: 3). The key objectives of the Rhodes University language policy are to promote English proficiency as well as to promote and recognize multilingualism and to advance the academic viability of languages such as IsiXhosa and Afrikaans. A study done by Philomina Aziakpono and Ian Bekker (2010) revealed that while many isiXhosa-speaking students at Rhodes University were happy with the English-only policy at the institution, others favoured the inclusion of isiXhosa alongside English as a language of teaching and learning. In their article, the authors emphasized that Rhodes University needed to conduct further research to explore how isiXhosa could be alongside English in terms of teaching and learning (Aziakpono andBekker, 2010: 51).

2.9 Impact of schooling – non-fee-paying public schools vs fee paying public and private schools

Many students face difficulties when it comes to adjusting from high school to a higher education institution. However as seen in Miniram and Maistry (2018: 307), the level of preparedness to enter the university space is largely dependent on the type of high school the student went to. The authors further state that students who come from historically disadvantaged or ill-equipped schools tend to have a harder time adjusting to higher education. There are various challenges which contribute to them having a significantly more difficult time with this adjustment, these may include inadequate access to quality teaching, limited educational resources, overcrowded classrooms, and socio-economic hardships, all of which can hinder their academic development and readiness for university-level studies (Davids, 2019:3).

These students may struggle with feelings of imposter syndrome, a lack of confidence in their abilities, and difficulties navigating the unfamiliar academic environment of university. Additionally, they may experience cultural and social barriers that further exacerbate their sense of isolation and alienation on campus (Tinto, 2003:2). Spaull (2015: 34), argues that most poor students who emerge from disadvantaged backgrounds and dysfunctional schools, tend to have gaps in their competence sets. In essence, there is a link between the type of high school that a student attended and the level of preparedness for higher education, and these differences highlight broader systemic inequalities within the education system.

2.10 Conclusion

To conclude this literature review, what can be seen is that the notion of decolonizing the curriculum remains a crucial conversation, especially in academia. Various scholars emphasize that decolonizing the curriculum is not just about adding knowledge from diverse continents, but it is about transforming the entire educational experience. Although these scholars all have different views on what it means to decolonize the curriculum, the common theme is that they are calling for a curriculum that truly embraces the diverse nature of the African lived experience and challenges the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives, knowledge and norms.

Chapter Three: Research Results and Findings

In this study, data was qualitatively gathered from in-depth interviews. In this chapter, I will be discussing the findings of the research I conducted. These interviews were conducted to understand how students within the Humanities Faculty experience learning and how these students understand the notion of decolonization. In this study, I used purposive sampling and aimed to interview students across various disciplines within the Humanities Faculty. While I cannot confidently claim that the interviewed participants' views and experiences are representative of the student body in the Humanities, I did ensure that students from ten different departments were interviewed so that views from across the faculty were represented. Fourteen interviews were conducted, consisting of undergraduate and postgraduate students within the Humanities Faculty. This chapter describes and analyzes the views of these students.

3.1 South African Schools and the Higher Education Curriculum

The first theme I will be touching on will be the impact of schooling on how the students interact with the university curriculum with a specific focus on epistemological access, which can be linked to decolonizing the curriculum. For the purpose of this thesis, two classifications will be used to label the type of schools identified during the data collection period: these being public non-fee-paying schools and fee-paying schools (both public and private) because learners from these two schooling backgrounds had different experiences when it came not only to accessing the curriculum, but also when it came to fully engaging with the curriculum in all its forms.

3.1.1 Former non-fee-paying school students

Three of the fourteen students interviewed came from historically disadvantaged schools. These types of schools will be classified under the non-fee-paying school category. Learners from these types of schools stated that they had a significantly more difficult time adjusting to learning not just within the Humanities Faculty but in the broader university sense.

This can be seen in the statements of a fourth-year social sciences student triple majoring in history, politics and law. The student highlighted that "my high school was public and the location in the rural areas whereby we're invisible".[1] This student believes that their schooling

[1] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science student 2 (30 August 2023).

background in the Eastern Cape, especially the lack of advanced facilities and being taught in Xhosa, affected their university adjustment, particularly in terms of language proficiency and the academic transition.

According to the authors Miniram and Maistry (2018: 307), the level of preparedness to enter the university space largely depends on the type of high school the student attended. They further state that students from historically disadvantaged or ill-equipped schools tend to have a more challenging time adjusting to higher education. This view can be linked to that of Spaull (2015: 34), who argues that most poor students from disadvantaged backgrounds and dysfunctional schools tend to have gaps in their competence sets. This was an important theme because the findings reflected that students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds struggled to adjust to university.

During the analysis of the data, I identified that students who went to schools that the students themselves would describe as being "ill-equipped" and lacking necessities, such as having teachers for certain subjects, described struggling to adjust to university, which in turn limited them fully accessing knowledge and the curriculum. One such student described their pre-university experience as follows.

> I think if I went to high school in Gauteng, things would have been better when I came to university. I went to high school in the Eastern Cape in the rural areas, where you don't have labs, but you do life science and physics. There is a lack of facilities; you are invisible, you don't participate in anything other than writing your exams and matric to pass and go.[2]

The student above believes that their schooling background in the Eastern Cape, especially the lack of advanced facilities and being taught in Xhosa, affected their university adjustment, particularly regarding language proficiency and the academic transition. In the interview, the student indicated that in her high school, the language of instruction was isiXhosa and that this later presented an issue for her:

[2] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 2 (30 August 2023).

> When I came to university, there was that language barrier whereby... I know what I want to say, but I have the fear of saying something wrong because your English is too advanced, and mine is like, I can write, but I can't speak.[3]

This experience was similar to that of another student, who stated that they believe that their experience in university would have been different if they had attended a different type of school.[4] This student attended a non-fee paying and non-English home language high school. The student stated that,

> When in the Humanities Faculty we are given readings to do, coming from the kind of high school that I came from, it's kind of difficult to understand the readings fully because there are words and big words that are put in readings that you cannot fully understand when answering tutorials and I feel like that on its own affected me into furthering my studies.[5]

As seen in Meiring et al. (2018), although in the post-apartheid context all racial groups legally have the right to any level of education, access is still limited due to the lingering effects of apartheid. From Morrow's (1994: 23) perspective, a student registered at a university does not automatically gain access to the knowledge that the university teaches. As shown in Morrow (2009: 78), improving access and diversifying the student population is a step in the right direction when it comes to decolonization. However, that does not guarantee epistemological access. One of the issues that students face when they come into a space that is not decolonized is alienation. According to Mann (2001: 8), alienation refers to "the estrangement of the learner [student] from what they should be engaged in, namely the subject and process of study itself". The author further states that when these students feel alienated, they feel that they are unable to engage or contribute in meaningful and productive ways to realise their own potential and learning requirements (Mann,2001: 43). The student above stated that she was not comfortable engaging with the lectures and some students out of a fear of being judged because of the way she was speaking.

This is significant because it highlights some South African education system issues. These issues not only impact the students whilst they are enrolled in high school but may affect how

[3] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 2 (30 August 2023).
[4] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 4 (31 October 2023).
[5] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 4 (31 October 2023).

equipped they are to adjust to University. Being fully prepared to engage with the content prescribed to you is vital to decolonizing the curriculum. On this note, from Morrow's perspective, a well-designed curriculum facilitates epistemological access, fosters academic development and promotes deep learning (Morrow, 2009: 13). Morrow relates epistemological access to the dominance of an empiricist epistemology in education. Morrow argues that there is a need to find new ways of thinking about teaching in South Africa if we are to meet the challenge of enabling all learners to gain epistemological access (Lotz-Sisitka, 2009: 57). Therefore, the issues raised by the students above point to deeper issues in the South African education system, but also suggest that in some instances the curriculum might not be responsive to a broader and more diverse student population.

The issues above raise questions, not only in relation to epistemological access, but also in terms of how students from non-fee-paying schools have a more difficult time accessing the explicit curriculum and interacting with the hidden curriculum. As seen in the work of Le Grange (2016), the explicit curriculum can include course outlines, syllabi, module frameworks, prescribed readings, assessment guidelines, and learning objectives. Whilst the hidden curriculum is what students learn about the dominant culture of a university and what values it reproduces. It encompasses the unspoken, implicit, and often unintentional lessons and values that students acquire through their educational experiences. It includes the cultural norms, values, and ideologies that are indirectly conveyed to students. The hidden curriculum can have a powerful influence on students' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Le Grange: 2016: 7). It shapes how students perceive the dominant culture within the educational institution. In this instance it can be argued that the Rhodes' hidden curriculum is one that prioritises English and leaving students who do not speak English well, to feel as if they do not belong in this space. The students' experiences with language, highlighted how difficult it was for some students to engage with the content, fellow students and lectures, because they were not comfortable in speaking English, and that in some instances, they felt that there were no spaces created, in which they could fully converse and express themselves, in their home language. This is significant, because it highlights how language, could present not only learning barrier, but could also impact various other aspects of a student's experience. In this instance it could be argued that the hidden curriculum presents the English language as the norm, othering non-English languages, to the point that students feel as if they are unable to participate and be a part of the dominant culture within the education system, if they do not speak the language. As

seen in Mann (2001), this could lead to alienation, which is a key aspect that needs to be addressed when speaking of decolonizing higher education and the curriculum.

3.1.2 Former fee-paying students

Eleven of the students interviewed attended fee-paying schools or a mix of fee-paying and non-fee-paying school. The students all had different experiences with regards to adjusting to university. From this group of students, two who came from a private schooling background, believes that the small nature of their classes contributed to their academic success.

One of these students stated that,

> The type of high school I attended was a private school; I would say I went to small classes. We were quite privileged in the sense that we had a lot of attention since our classes were quite small.[6]

The other one stated that:

> Because everything's like smaller, I feel like I got more attention, I had more confidence to go up to my teachers.[7]

However, the student further stated that:

> When I came here, I kind of felt like, oh, where am I? As soon as they say you're going to be a number, they weren't lying, you're going to be a number. So, it was very less impersonal, I guess. It's kind of harder to get help, I would say. I think that's the adjustment I suffered with.[8]

In this instance, the student's issues were in relation to university adjustment, as opposed to having issues with accessing the curriculum, due to barriers such as language. Whilst speaking about her experience in both a private school and government school setting, a student stated the following:

> So, I found out that when I completed my grade 11, which was at a private school, this sort of prepared us for university in the sense that we used to reference and all of that. And we had like debates and courses like history, and then when I went to a government

[6] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science Language student (13 September 2023).
[7] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 3 (29 August 2023).
[8] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 3 (29 August 2023).

> school, it was more like memorizing the textbook, … teaching us how to reference it wasn't important. And I also feel the way that we sort of engage at private school is more like preparing us in terms of, you know, how to understand readings and all of that. So, we sort of do things that are more practical for university compared to high school, to my government school [where] we just sort of like memorize the textbook.[9]

The student above is expressing a comparison between their experiences in a private school and a public government non-fee-paying school, particularly in relation to how each educational institution prepared them for university. The student states that the private school provided a more practical and engaging approach to teaching and learning, that involved activities such as referencing, debates, and provided them with instances in which they could learn to apply their knowledge. In contrast, their experience learning in a non-fee-paying school is described as being centred on the memorization of textbook content with less emphasis on practical skills like referencing. The student suggests that the private school better equipped them for university-level work compared to the government school.

A social sciences postgraduate student who attended a fee-paying public school described their university adjustment as follows:

> I didn't feel as though I had any issues adjusting to university and my upbringing from kindergarten to primary school to high school has been the same type of environment that I was socialized in. So, coming to university was just the academic jump, I suppose, in terms of content and intensity, but in terms of adjusting, I'm not sure if [there was any impact].[10]

From the interviewed students, a pattern emerged that indicated that students who attended fee-paying schools were able to adjust relatively more easily to being at university and the university curricula. The interviewees from historically disadvantaged, non-fee-paying schools tended to struggle a bit more than those from fee-paying schools. There were differences in experiences between students from these two schooling backgrounds in areas such as content comprehension, language barriers, university preparedness, and overall feeling comfortable in the university.

[9] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 4 (8 September 2023).
[10] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 3 (25 October 2023).

This can be problematic because it suggests the need for more progress in the higher education space and the South African education system itself.. Furthermore, it can be argued that there needs to be more connection between the university space and students from historically disadvantaged schools. There is a need to ensure that the university space transcends the legacy of colonialism such that no student feels alienated and unable to engage and be a part of the curriculum.

3.2 How Students Define Decolonization

The data gathered showed that the students each had their own interpretation of what it means to decolonize the curriculum. The interviewed students were all asked to define, in their own words, what "decolonizing the curriculum" means to them. As seen in the literature that was reviewed, such as the works of Mudimbe (1988), Mignolo (2011), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019), and Le Grange (2020), different authors have their own views on what exactly decolonizing the curriculum entails. Although not all scholars agree on what a fully decolonized curriculum looks like, drawing from the literature, it can be argued that a decolonized curriculum is one that has a few of the following characteristics. Firstly, it prioritizes the centrality of Indigenous knowledge alongside Western knowledge systems, recognizing diverse ways of knowing rooted in local cultures and traditions (Le Grange, 2016; Mheta et al., 2018). Secondly, it ensures representation and respect for diverse voices and perspectives, challenging dominant narratives and biases while reflecting the lived experiences of historically marginalized groups (Aoki, 1991; Zembylas, 2018). Thirdly it incorporates inclusive pedagogical approaches and linguistic diversity, accommodating diverse learning styles and valuing indigenous languages alongside Western languages (Rhodes University, 2018; Lumadi, 2021). Ultimately it can be argued that a fully decolonized curriculum or department is one that strives to advance social justice and equity within higher education, seeks to dismantle systemic inequalities and inclusive learning environments for all students (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Zembylas, 2018).

The common theme that can be identified from the literature is that is that "decolonizing" in relation to the curriculum entails addressing the historical effects of colonialism on the curriculum. Where some authors might differ within academia is what precisely managing these effects means. This section seeks to discuss the definitions provided by the students in relation to the reviewed literature.

3.2.1 Decolonization as Unlearning

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Wa Thiong'o (1986) believe that Eurocentric epistemology was and continues to be used as a tool for invading the African mental universe. Furthermore, Kessi et al. (2020: 271) define decolonization as a "political and normative ethic and practice of resistance and intentional undoing, unlearning and dismantling unjust practices, assumptions and institutions".

This aligns with the views shared by four of the students interviewed. The key idea behind the views of these students is that decolonization involves addressing the effects of colonialism, and one of the main ways in which this can be done is through "unlearning". The first participant who had this view was a Bachelor of Social Science student who, when asked to define decolonizing the curriculum, described it as "Unlearning to learn". When asked to elaborate, the student stated:

> When I say learning to unlearn [I mean that] just because something is written down or is codified doesn't mean it's the correct thing. Just because someone powerful said, it doesn't mean it's the right way to do that. So, we can unlearn what we've been taught to learn, like open our mind to new ways, new possible ways and not be caged in the corner.[11]

This view above was similar to that of a Bachelor of Journalism student, who when asked to explain the notion of decolonizing the curriculum stated the following:

> I think one way that comes to mind is like unlearning – unlearning patterns, like the patterns that have been instilled in you. So, when I think of decolonization, I think of like unlearning maybe certain patterns or behaviours that have been instilled in you by maybe society or your family or whatever.[12]

Furthermore, another social sciences student had a similar interpretation of decolonizing the curriculum, in which they defined it as

> To get rid of old ways of thinking and try and understand why we think that way and come up with new ways of thinking. [13]

In line with this theme, a Bachelor of Arts student stated that,

[11] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 2 (30 August 2023).
[12] Interview with Bachelor of Journalism student 1 (30 August 2023).
[13] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science student 1 (5 September 2023).

> I would say that decolonization to me is, or entails, the liberation of one's mind, right? So, it is the rethinking of certain ideas, and the renewal of, like, let's say, old ideas as well. [14]

The above students believe that decolonizing the curriculum for them means that there is intellectual independence, critical thinking, and a willingness to challenge established norms. These views can be linked to the work of authors such as Mignolo (2011), who believe that there is a need to address Western knowledge, which played and, in some instances, continues to play an instrumental role in maintaining the "colonial matrix of power". This is why, according to the author, there is a need for "epistemic de-linking" to take place.

The perspectives of these students can also be linked to the works of scholars such as Mudimbe (1988), who reject the idea that European knowledge is the most superior form of knowledge there is. As discussed earlier, from Mudimbe's (1988:28) perspective, there is a need to address "epistemological ethnocentrism". By this, he is referring to the belief in which European scholars believe that nothing of importance and significance can be learned from non-Europeans. These European scholars who engaged in epistemological ethnocentrism were and still are of the view that there is nothing to learn from the African continent. In this instance, the students view decolonization as addressing the effects of colonialism, which can be done by embracing new ways of thinking, learning and teaching. These students also call for the liberation of the mind and unlearning the norms and patterns instilled by the colonial powers.

3.2.2 Decolonization as Systemic Change

Some students' definitions of decolonization had an overall theme that decolonization involves taking action to challenge and dismantle the legacy of colonialism in various aspects of society, including culture, education, politics, and economics. One of these students was a third-year student who stated that,

> For me, decolonization is an aspiration, first and foremost, I think. It's supposed to inform action. But the more that you interrogate what decolonization is and what it can look like normatively or what it can look like in practice, it becomes so much more complex.[15]

[14] Interview with Bachelor of Arts student 1 (1 September 2023).
[15] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science Language student (13 September 2023).

The student above further stated:

> I feel like colonization made the world that is. So, it's tough to discern what [needs to be decolonized], and that's why I think the idea of colonization for me or decolonization for me is like, it's such a…. It's a breakdown of our whole system.[16]

Essentially, this student believes that colonialism affected various aspects of the world. Furthermore, from their perspective, when thinking about decolonizing, the student suggests that it's a process that involves dismantling systems.

This view was similar to that of a post-graduate student pursuing a media and journalism studies diploma. This student believes that decolonization is a process which involves "doing away with colonial systems".[17] Similar to this theme was a definition given by an undergraduate Bachelor of Journalism student who defined decolonization as

> Dismantling this set of fixed structures, that's what I think of, like dismantling and deconstructing what is the norm.[18]

The views of the students above can be linked to the Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), Lebalaone (2017), and Fanon (2001), who view decolonization as a radical process which involves addressing the various ways in which colonialism affected the colonized people. As seen in the work of Fanon (2001) and Lebeloane (2017), colonialism contributed to the destruction and overall devaluation of indigenous knowledge systems from the African continent. Lebeloane (2017: 2) argues that these colonized people lost their expertise to create and interpret knowledge. Frantz Fanon argued that colonialism goes beyond just the physical aspect of domination. It also involves the destruction of the colonized people's history and making the colonizer's history that of the colonized. This, in turn, affects the colonized people's language, culture, names and history. The students described in this section define decolonization as systemic change that challenges the hegemonic norms and values instilled by colonialism. Their approach is in line with those of decolonial scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), Mamdani (2016) and Mignolo (2011), who call for a fundamental reimagining and restructuring of societal institutions, including higher education, to address the underlying power imbalances and colonial legacies.

[16] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science Language student (13 September 2023).
[17] Interview with Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism student (24 October 2023).
[18] Interview with Bachelor of Journalism student 2 (7 September 2023).

3.2.3 Decolonization as Africanization or Indigenization

Some students provided another perspective of what decolonization entails: from their perspective, the Africanisation of the curriculum is needed for decolonization. This can be seen by the argument of a postgraduate journalism student who argues:

> Decolonization in the African context goes well with Africanization. So, there's a need for Africans to be Africanized, as in embracing African philosophy.[19]

Another student stated that:

> A lot of work, for example, that we learn in psychology … It's like … They do try to bring like an African perspective, but most of the work that we deal with or theories or psychologists that we learn about are like Westernized, you know.[20]

A third-year Bachelor of Arts student also supports Africanization, commenting: "Maybe we could decolonize the curriculum by engaging with our African histories".[21]

This student described a decolonized department as one that is actively decolonizing the curriculum by implementing changes like learning African histories, eliminating sub-human classifications, and rethinking thinking. The student argues that:

> Interrogating ways in which we can decolonize the curriculum, is what decolonization means. And, of course, implementing things like writing a native language, learning your histories, our African histories.[22]

When asked to describe what decolonization means to them, a student described it as,

> Moving away from our previous history, moving away from things that happened in South Africa, and trying to find means to be authentic and live the African way [and] improve Africanity.[23]

These students express a desire to have a less Westernized curriculum, one which incorporates the African perspective. This definition of decolonizing the curriculum is consistent with that of scholars such as Blignaut (2020), Du Preez and Ramrathan (2020), and Le Grange (2016), who are in support of university curricula in which there is an integration of knowledge from

[19] Interview with Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism Student (24 October 2023).
[20] Interview with Bachelor of Journalism student 1 (30 August 2023).
[21] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 1 (1 September 2023).
[22] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 1 (1 September 2023).
[23] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 4 (31 October 2023).

both Western and African academia. The stance taken by these scholars is that when thinking of decolonizing the curriculum, it is essential that there is an in-depth analysis of the knowledge that is in the curriculum. This is because the decolonization of the curriculum requires an extensive look at what and whose knowledge is included in higher education institutions and education programs.

The above statements are complemented by those of students who emphasised the importance of promoting indigenous or local knowledge. For example, a final year Bachelor of Arts student defined decolonization as "changing the way that we learn to sort of accommodate more indigenous studies, more indigenous knowledge".[24] What these students are calling for is not the elimination of Western knowledge and its replacement with African perspectives into the curriculum. As Motsa (2017: 34) argues, such a replacement does not automatically result in the decolonization of the educational space. These students' views are in line with what Motsa (2017) suggests, which is that the African syllabus should be taught parallel to and in comparison, with the colonial syllabus, because this is one way in which we can foster the growth of local epistemologies.

A Bachelor of Fine Arts student in the humanities commented:

> I feel like now [the curriculum is] more surrounded around white people because I think maybe they have more experience in the art world than my [African] people do, but I think just having a broader range of lecturers would maybe lead to that and maybe not learning so much about Western culture and not being taught in the same way as the Western culture as well.[25]

This statement reflects the student's desire for a more inclusive, open and diverse department that provides a broader range of knowledge and a more racially diverse staff. The views of this student can be linked to those of students from the knowledge-making project known as With Dreams in Our Hands (WDIOH), who argue that it is essential to have more black African lecturers, and lecturers who care about students (Knowles *et al,*2023: 7).

[24] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 4 (8 September 2023).
[25] Interview with Fine Arts Student 1 (28 September 2023).

The Fine Arts student above hopes to learn more about art history in South Africa and move away from focusing on Western culture. This can be seen in the student's statement about what she would like to learn:

> [I'd like] to learn about the history of art in South Africa because most of the history that we learn is based off information from America or like outside countries. So, like there isn't much exposure for the art that is South African.[26]

The statements of the two students above can be linked to the works of Jansen (2017: 5) and Knowles et al. (2023:6=7) who argues that the people who teach the curriculum and what is taught both play an important part in the process of decolonizing the curriculum.

This statement can also be linked to that of a student who described a decolonized department as a department that embraces Ubuntu. The student explained further that this means "not just Ubuntu for the students and the lecturers, but it's also for any other staff that's there".[27] This view can be linked to the work of Le Grange (2016:14), who suggests that a decolonized curriculum is one that embraces the philosophy of Ubuntu.

3.3 Language and Decolonization

According to the works of scholars such as Wa Thiong'o (1994), Mbembe (2015), and Mheta et al. (2018: 4), there is a need to have African languages at the centre of African universities. As previously stated, Mheta et al. (2018:4) argue that to decolonize does not necessarily mean that we should dismantle all Western traditions but rather that we should be prioritizing African knowledge at the core, alongside various knowledge traditions expressed in diverse languages. Various scholars such as Mbembe (2015), Mheta et al. (2018), and Wa Thiong'o (1994), advocate for elevating African languages from the periphery to the centre and emphasize that this shift is essential for the creation of an environment that is conducive for decolonization to take place.

Although all the research participants could read, write and communicate in English, all fourteen participants stated that English was not their home language. This study sought to clarify their experiences learning at an English medium university. There were varying levels of fluency among the participants when it came to the use of English. The research participants were affected differently by the centrality of English at Rhodes University, with some having

[26] Interview with Fine Arts Student 1 (28 September 2023).
[27] Interview with Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism Student (24 October 2023).

no issues at all about language, whilst some struggled to adjust from learning in other languages in high school to having English at the centre of their learning.

Students were asked two questions about language. This was done to understand how language fits into discussions around decolonizing the curriculum and, more importantly, whether the students themselves deem it to be necessary in relation to curriculum decolonization. When asked whether or not they perceived language to be necessary for the decolonization of the curriculum, most of the interviewed students believe it was relevant to the discussion about decolonizing the curriculum.

One third-year Bachelor of Arts student argues that coloniality is perpetuated by ways of classifying some people as "sub-human" and suggested that language is part of this: those who speak some languages are treated as less human. This student further stated that "Decolonizing the curriculum would be to get rid of that [treating those who do not speak English as sub-human] maybe, and rethinking thinking itself".[28]

This response was similar to that of a Fine Arts student who stated that,

> I feel like since there are students that are coming from other places, they should kind of look into that and allow the learning of different languages and the use of those languages in classes as well because English is very limiting to some people. Not everyone is fluent in English and not everyone is capable of learning English, especially in this time and age. So, I think there should be more inclusion of languages even if they're not used the most in this town, but I feel like it would really benefit with the idea of encouraging equality and inclusion all in all.[29]

Another Bachelor of Arts student argues that language is essential in decolonization. According to them, the use of English as the primary language may not resonate with African people's mother tongues, which is why they suggest teaching in languages that are more suitable and relevant to students. According to the student:

> I think it is because in a sense, like, if we're being more efficient in the South African context, like English isn't necessarily African people's mother tongue, you know, we have our own languages. And I feel it's easier to teach everyone one language because

[28] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 1 (1 September 2023).
[29] Interview with Fine Arts Student 1 (28 September 2023).

> the language itself is a part of colonization. I feel like it's something we've inherited from it.[30]

When asked about the relationship between decolonization and language, a postgraduate journalism student stated that, "Language is very important psychologically, it's very important as well in terms of how people identify themselves".[31]

This view can be linked to those of Lumadi (2021:39) and Odora-Hoppers and Pinar (2017:9), who argue that language significantly influences the shaping of a person's social and cultural identity. From the perspective of such authors, students who possess a solid grounding in their home language often exhibit a more profound comprehension of their own identity and societal role, along with an elevated sense of well-being and self-assurance. This can positively impact various aspects of their lives, including their academics.

In terms of the usage of language within academia, the interviewed students had varying opinions on the topic. Some students expressed that whilst English was not their first language, the use of the language did not present any barriers to learning. One such student was a third-year Bachelor of Journalism student, who stated, "I'm more comfortable in both. With IsiXhosa, it helps me with understanding. But with English, I can communicate with it."[32] In contrast to this statement, a fourth-year Bachelor of Social Science student stated that, "You can teach me in English, but I will write in Xhosa".[33]

Three students felt that language presented a barrier, not only in terms of fully engaging with the content they were learning but also in terms of limiting how comfortable they were with engaging with their peers and lecturers. The first was a third-year Bachelor of social science student who commented as follows:

> I think one of the challenging things is English. There's English that you are taught in school, and there's this English [at university]. My English teacher used to teach everything in Xhosa. I was taught maths in Xhosa. So, when I came to university, there was that language barrier whereby... I know what I want to say, but I have the fear of

[30] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 3 (29 August 2023).
[31] Interview with Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism Student (24 October 2023).
[32] Interview with Bachelor of Journalism student 2 (7 September 2023).
[33] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science student 2 (30 August 2023).

> saying something wrong because your English is too advanced, and mine is like, I can write, but I can't speak.[34]

This experience was similar to that of a student in the fine arts department who stated that:

> I personally don't understand most of the language. Like they use this formal or like too academic language when it comes to giving assignments and stuff like that so it kind of limits me personally from being able to engage fully with understanding and to actually enjoy learning about that information because of the formal or academic language that they use. They don't really use like simplified language. They rather use complex language that really needs you to fight to get to reach an understanding.[35]

The last student also shared these sentiments and stated that,

> It's a bit challenging, especially in tutorials or lectures when you are being asked questions and then you have to answer them in English, however the way you actually want to explain it is in your own language. When I am reading my own readings apart from the tutorial discussions, they make sense when I translate them in my own language, that's when I can like fully to understand. But when I'm in the tutorial I am forced to speak English, even though it's difficult for me to speak English in front of people, especially coming from the high school I came from. Even [when] we were taught English, you could explain something in your own language just to show you know what this means.[36]

These three students expressed the challenges they faced in relation to language barriers in their university experience. Although all three students could read, write and understand English, they expressed that, in some instances, the way in which English was used in the academic setting at the University impacted how much they could engage with not only the content they were learning but also with lectures and fellow students in a tutorial setting. Overall, these students highlighted how the language barrier limited their academic engagement and social interactions within the university context. As seen in Davids (2019), attention needs to be focused on the identities and contexts of these students, in order to allow these students to gain access to the university space both externally (through being enrolled) and internally (through feeling included and having a voice). This is why Boughey and Niven (2012: 642), argue that

[34] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science student 2 (30 August 2023).
[35] Interview with Fine Arts Student 1 (28 September 2023).
[36] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 4 (31 October 2023).

it is important for higher education institutions to embrace academic practices that facilitate epistemological access.

There have been attempts at the institution to incorporate specific African languages within the Humanities Faculty. One of these languages is isiXhosa, the most predominant language within the Eastern Cape, where Rhodes University is located. Departments such as the Department of Political and International Studies allow students to submit some of their work in isiXhosa. At face value, this initiative seems beneficial for local learners who might have trouble understanding the coursework. However, from the data gathered, even though some of the students knew there was an option to submit in another language, they had decided not to use this mechanism. One of the reasons for not utilizing this mechanism was the turnover time it took to receive feedback on work submitted in another language other than English. According to one student:

> I haven't used isiXhosa in terms of submission because sometimes I worry that it might take long for me to get my results or get back my assignment. Because I know from other people that I've talked with, the problem with them is that they are told that there's no one to mark or it takes longer to get someone to mark their paper if they have written their paper in their own home language. So, to avoid any of those obstacles, I just do it in English.[37]

When describing her experience with using a different language in a tutorial setting, a student stated that,

> Yes, we do that [use isiXhosa], but when you actually do it, other peers they look at you, as if they don't understand why you're speaking your own language even though they can't hear [do not understand] you. They [peers] give you that look, so it's not really that comfortable even though you are given the platform to speak your own language.[38]

The views of the students are consistent with those raised in a study conducted by Philomina Aziakpono and Ian Bekker (2010), in which the authors suggest that there is a need for Rhodes University to conduct further research that is aimed at delving into the potential integration of isiXhosa alongside English within the realm of teaching and learning (Aziakpono and Bekker, 2010: 51). In their article the authors emphasized the need to explore the dynamic interplay

[37] Interview with Bachelor of Journalism student 2 (7 September 2023).
[38] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 4 (31 October 2023).

between isiXhosa and English, with the aim of understanding how these languages could coexist and contribute to a more inclusive and effective educational environment.

3.4 Students' Perception of Departmental Decolonization

This section will focus on analysing students' experiences within the Humanities Faculty. This section will explore how the interviewed students experience learning within their relevant departments. The students interviewed were asked about their perspectives on decolonizing the curriculum, focusing on their respective departments. This section will be divided into three: the first will be looking at the responses from students who firmly believe that their department(s) are decolonized, the second will be discussing the views of students who were sceptical that their department was fully decolonized but had positive responses to some aspects of their department and its curriculum, the last section I will be looking at the responses from students who firmly felt that their department and curriculum were not decolonized.

During the interview, students were firstly asked to define decolonization and were then asked whether they would consider their departments decolonized based on their interpretation. Most of the interviewed students were studying in more than one department and so students were invited to give their perspectives on any or all the relevant departments. The research participants were comprised of students from departments such as Sociology, History, Law, Political and International Studies, Philosophy, Journalism, Anthropology, French, Psychology, Fine Arts, and Drama. I will break down the discussion in this section according to how to students who believe that their department was fully decolonized, followed by somewhat decolonized, and lastly will be those who believe that their department and curriculum are not decolonized.

They key point of this discussion was not necessarily to identify which departments were decolonized and which were not, but rather to highlight what students who believe their department was decolonized and those who believe it is not, pointed to when describing their experiences in their departments. It is for this reason that the names of the departments were not used in this next section. The idea is to get a sense of students' perception of departmental decolonization, as well as what lessons could be drawn from these students' experiences in the overall discourse on decolonizing higher education and the curriculum.

3.4.1 Students who believe that their department is decolonized.

Some students expressed that they feel that their departments had made significant steps to ensure that not only the department was decolonized, but also that the curriculum was

decolonized. One such student stated that she believes that her department is decolonized. When asked to explain, the student stated that:

> For this question specifically, I'd like to say yes. Because the people at my department, they really are not like rigid. They don't want us to follow like maybe a syllabus that I was taught in high school, you know, that very linear type of same history same whatever. And a lot of that stuff was concealed now that I'm learning more about our history. So, in my department, they definitely encourage us to, excuse me, be bold, find our voices, search for more information, look for things in archives that have been hidden from, like, your commercial history.[39]

In this instance, the student views her department as decolonized because it fosters an environment that values critical thinking and explores broader historical perspectives. The student distinguishes the history she learnt in high school from the one she is currently learning; she uses the word "our" which implies a sense of familiarity and relatedness with the content that she is learning. The literature suggests that the department teaches a curriculum that is relevant to its context. The student's perspective can be linked to the work of Zembylas (2018), who argues that decolonizing higher education is "a political, social, and epistemic process and a project that implies a critical examination of dominant structures of knowledge and their power relationship". In this instance, the student felt that they were able to learn a version of history which was not present in their school curriculum; they state that learning in their department has allowed them to explore knowledge that was previously concealed.[40]

Another student who believes that their department was decolonized, argues that the department's space and its curriculum were decolonized because:

> [There is] more space for like... If I can say Africanness, if I can put it that way. There's more, there's quite a wider space in that of like we can bring like our own influence of things. We don't need to just follow the standards that has been set by other people, but we can bring our own way of doing things within that field.[41]

[39] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 3 (25 October 2023).
[40] Interview with Bachelor of Social Sciences student 3 (25 October 2023).
[41] Interview with Bachelor of Journalism student 1 (30 August 2023).

3.4.2 Students that feel that their departments are trying to decolonize.

A third-year Bachelor of Arts student believes that whilst positive steps have been taken to decolonize, there are still remnants of colonization in the institution and its curriculum. The student described a decolonized department as actively decolonizing the curriculum by implementing changes like learning African histories, eliminating sub-human classifications, and rethinking thinking. The student argues that:

> Interrogating ways in which we can decolonize the curriculum is what decolonization means. And, of course, implementing things like writing a native language, learning your histories, our African histories. That's what a decolonized department would look like, I would like to think. There isn't … I don't think there is a certain … I don't think decolonization is a certain look.[42]

When a student was asked whether or not they believe that their department was decolonized, the student stated:

> I would say that [the department is] trying to be … It's a very difficult thing. It's trying to be [decolonized] in the sense that from time to time, we have people that write in African languages. But the department itself, a lot of the people that are in power – and look, it's possible to be decolonized, right, but also still have Caucasian people, right? But if you have Caucasian people with a system that's still similar to a system from 20 years ago, you can say that you're trying to decolonize but it's not yet there. I would say that it's going there, but it's a very difficult thing.[43]

This statement by the student suggests that while there may be efforts to move towards decolonization, there are still significant hurdles and ongoing issues. The inclusion of people from diverse backgrounds, including white individuals, is acknowledged as a potential aspect of a decolonized setting. The student emphasizes that simply having a diverse group of individuals is insufficient if the underlying structures and systems remain entrenched in colonial legacies. This statement can be linked to the argument made by Sardar (2008: 18), in which the author argues that the effects of colonialism on colonized states are still visible today because, although colonialism has ended, "the underlying structures of oppression and injustice remain the same".

[42] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 1 (1 September 2023).
[43] Interview with Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism Student (24 October 2023).

A final year Bachelor of Social Sciences was conflicted; while she believes that one of her departments was somewhat decolonized, she stated that she was unsure whether her other department would ever be fully decolonized. This is reflected in the statement in which she argues, "I don't know if there'll ever be a time that it'll be fully decolonized. So, I'm not too sure how to answer that."[44]

A different student shared their experience on this question of departmental decolonization. This student defined decolonization as "changing the way that we learn to sort of accommodate more indigenous studies, more indigenous knowledge".[45] When asked about whether or not the student perceives their departments to be decolonized, they stated that a decolonized department is one in which there is not an overreliance on Western literature. The student further elaborated and stated, "I think [my department] is a different scenario because most of the stuff really, I think it does sort of integrate both sides"[46] What the student meant by "both sides" in this instance is that they felt there was not an over-reliance on Western literature and there was an integration that had been made in which more African literature was included in what they were learning. The student believes that their department had made efforts to become more decolonized by including more including more African literature. This can be seen in their statement in which they state that:

> With the course that we're doing now, which is trade unions, right? So, they sort of like moving towards an approach of bringing African literature and like how trade unions work in Africa as a whole. And we sort of like leaving out the part where we learn about trade unions in Argentina.[47]

The student above believes that their department is "trying" to decolonize, which suggests that from their perspective, the efforts that have been made are a step in the right direction for decolonization to take place however a bit more needs to be done to consider it to be decolonized.

The view of the student above is very similar to that of a final-year Bachelor of Social Sciences student:

[44] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science student 1 (5 September 2023).
[45] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 4 (8 September 2023).
[46] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 4 (8 September 2023).
[47] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 4 (8 September 2023).

> Well, the one way that I think it is [decolonized], is just how people are able to write in their own language. So, it's accommodating other languages as academic [languages], as opposed to just being English. Would I consider it decolonized? Yes, I would, to a certain extent.[48]

This student positively views the option to submit in languages other than English within their departments. From their perspective, it is important to accommodate diverse languages and move beyond a strict adherence to English as the sole academic language at Rhodes University. The speaker sees the inclusion of other languages in academic discourse as a meaningful step toward decolonization, suggesting a broader and more inclusive approach to knowledge production and dissemination. While this acknowledges the progress that has been made, the student states that they would consider the departments to be decolonized "to a certain extent" implying that additional aspects or measures may be needed for a more comprehensive decolonization of academic practices.

3.4.3 Why some students believe that their deportment is not decolonized.

Amongst the interview participants, some students felt that their department(s) were not decolonized. Various reasons were provided by the students and in this section. I will discuss why the students believe these spaces and the curriculum were not decolonized. The key reasons cited by some of the students who felt their departments were not decolonized were a lack of lecturer diversity, an overreliance on Western literature which places African knowledge at the periphery, or which treats such knowledge as "other", and a failure to move away from a curriculum that is Eurocentric and based in Western ways of learning, norms and beliefs.

One such example was from a student who firmly believes that two of the departments she has experienced are not decolonized. When asked whether the student believes their departments were decolonized, the response was "definitely" not. When asked to elaborate, the student stated that:

> Because most of it, I think we just sort of like learning things that are foreign to us. And we can't really relate to some of the content, but we just have to grasp it for the sake of passing. So, I think they're not making a lot of effort ... I mean, I don't feel like they speak to the content of Africans because the way we form stories and how they form

[48] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science student 1 (5 September 2023).

> stories is different. So, we sort of like taught, okay, we need to form stories this way, although it's your own, but it sort of has reference to that. It's not really you. So, you can't tell your story from their perspective.[49]

Another student in the final year of a Bachelor of Arts degree also does not believe that their department is decolonized. According to the student:

> A lot of the things we learn about … we learn about a lot of old white men. It's a lot of their theories. And I'm not saying that their theories don't make sense, but like, they kind of sometimes don't fit into our generation.[50]

These statements from the students above can be linked to the work of Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2006: 117), who argues that books, cultural patterns, the self-image of people, and the criteria that are used to measure academic performance coloniality keep coloniality alive. This theme was picked up from some of the interviewed students who indicated that although some progress had been made regarding decolonization, a significant amount of work was needed for them to consider their department decolonized.

As seen in the works of De Sousa Santos (2014:92), "Unequal exchanges among cultures have always implied the death of the knowledge of the subordinated culture". The students above expressed that from their experience learning in their department, they felt that they were learning things that felt foreign or disconnected from their own experiences, especially when it comes to cultural elements like storytelling. The students mentioned that they had trouble relating to content because it does not necessarily reflect their own perspective. As seen in the works of Jansen (2017: 5), an important aspect when looking at how the curriculum can be decolonized is looking at not only looking at what is being taught but also who is teaching the content. In this instance the student felt under-represented not only in terms of the content they were learning, but also in relation to the department's demographics.

Scholars such as Aoki (1991) emphasize the importance of structuring the curriculum as a lived experience. Aoki argues that such an approach enables students to actively analyse and actively be involved in the process of decolonize the curriculum. This can be achieved through the

[49] Interview with Bachelor of Arts Student 4 (8 September 2023).
[50] Interview with Bachelor of Arts student 3 (29 August 2023).

incorporation of methods such as this, which empower students to critically engage with the material and advocate for changes that foster a more inclusive educational environment.

When a fourth-year student was asked about their perception of departmental decolonization, they stated that,

> My experience with [Department A] is that there is less emotion in the department. It's more about being on the right track. And then, with [Department B], it allows you the sense of opinion. [Department B] and [Department C] give you the chance to voice your opinions and ideas. Then, in [Department A], you can't do that because it's already codified.[51]

The student above stated that they did not believe that all their departments were decolonized, but the ones that they viewed as being more decolonized were because their curriculum allowed for more personalization. From their perspective, one of their departments was not decolonized because it was rigid and less willing to unlearn established norms.[52]

When a third-year student was asked about their perspective on how decolonized their departments were, in relation to one of her departments, the student stated that,

> I don't think it is decolonized. I think also maybe that's also the challenge. How do you decolonize something that is maybe scientifical in a sense? How do you decolonize that? That's a harder question. But I definitely don't think so.[53]

The two students above felt that their departments were not decolonized because they were too rigid and unwilling to change. Another reason that was cited by a student for why they believe that their department was not decolonized was because of a lack of diversity and representation of lecturers.[54] This student also suggested a shift away from an overwhelming focus on Western culture in their department. They felt that currently their department is overly centered around white individuals and suggests that a broader range of lecturers could contribute to a more inclusive educational experience, bringing diverse perspectives and experiences into the curriculum.[55] The student hopes to learn more about art history in South Africa and move away

[51] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science student 2 (30 August 2023).
[52] Interview with Bachelor of Social Science student 2 (30 August 2023).
[53] Interview with Bachelor of Arts student 1 (1 September 2023).
[54] Interview with Bachelor of Arts student 1 (1 September 2023).
[55] Interview with Fine Arts Student 1 (28 September 2023).

from focusing on Western culture. This can be seen in the student's statement, in which the student describes how she would instead be taught. She states that she would like:

> To learn about the history of art in South Africa because most of the history that we learn is based off information from America or like outside countries. So, like there isn't much exposure for the art that is South African. [56]

As previously stated, it is very important that the curriculum is responsive to the students that it's being taught to. A way to remedy this issue can be through an approach to teaching suggested by authors such as Ladson-Billings (2014) and Morrison et al. (2022), who advocate for a culturally responsive teaching approach to teaching. In this education approach, the key goal is both inclusiveness and cultural sensitivity. This approach is seen as fostering a deeper connection between students and the subject matter, which enhances the overall learning experience and facilitates better retention and practical application of knowledge.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at students' perceptions of departmental decolonization. This chapter began with a discussion on the experiences of students from different schooling backgrounds, when it came to adjusting to university. The data revealed that all the interviewed students who came from non-fee-paying schools, struggled with their adjustment to university. Some of the issues highlighted by these students were linked to how they felt their schools did not properly equip them to enter the university space. Another aspect that was explored is the learners' experiences learning in an English medium institution.

As previously stated, all the interviewed did not have english as their mother tongue or primary language. The data revealed that there were varying levels of fluency among students and challenges in adjusting to English-centric learning. The students also highlighted that the predominant use of English within the university presented a language barrier, which limited how much they could actively engage with the content, be it in the lecture, tutorial or in academic writing. The interview data reviewed that the students believe there is a need to properly incorporate African languages into the curriculum of African universities, which aligns with scholars' calls for decolonization, Students advocate for language inclusivity, linking it to decolonization efforts. The last section of this chapter was focused on analysing the responses from the participants, who each had their own reasons for believing that their

[56] Interview with Fine Arts Student 1 (28 September 2023).

departments were either decolonized or not decolonized. Some students were undecided or on the fence and would like to see a few more things improved before being thoroughly convinced that decolonization has taken place. The purpose of this chapter was to highlight the perspectives of these students on the notion of decolonizing the curriculum. The experiences of these students, provide valuable insight into key issues such as, curriculum decolonization, department transformation and curriculum responsiveness, epistemological access and the use of African languages within higher education in South Africa. Overall, they contribute to the discussions pertaining to higher education and curriculum decolonization.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

The primary objective of this thesis was to investigate students' experiences in the Humanities Faculty, specifically focusing on their perspectives on the topic of decolonization. This research was grounded in two key themes that were aimed at providing insights into the decolonization of the curriculum within the Humanities Faculty. The first theme looked how students perceive the concept of decolonizing the curriculum. This involves exploring their definitions of decolonization and examining the alignment of these definitions with existing literature on the subject. Given the historical context of Rhodes University as a historically white institution, the second theme focuses on examining how students experience learning within the Humanities Faculty, with a specific emphasis on epistemological access. In this theme I explored the kind of access obtained by interviewed students in the Humanities Faculty with the aim of establish connections with the overarching theme of decolonizing the curriculum. Another theme which was discussed, was the relationship between language and decolonization.

In order to achieve the objectives of this research study, this thesis looked to answer the following questions:

- What do Humanities students think about the decolonization of university curricula and how do they experience the Humanities curriculum at Rhodes University

- What lessons can be drawn from the students' experiences in terms of better understanding what it means to decolonize higher education?

This thesis explored the relationship between schooling background and epistemological access. As seen in the literature despite, the ending of Apartheid, the effects of this system are still visible in the South African education system. This means that decolonization efforts, should aim to not only diversify the student population, but also facilitate the creation of a space in which all students are able to achieve meaningful engagement with the curriculum. What this means is that more than physical access would have been provided to these students but also epistemological access. The data revealed that some students are still facing issues pertaining to epistemological access and alienation.

Furthermore, the interviewed students from non-fee-paying schools highlighted difficulties in navigating both the explicit (course content) and hidden (unspoken lessons and cultural norms)

curriculum. The data suggests that Rhodes University's hidden curriculum, which prioritizes English, may marginalize students not proficient in the language, which creates a learning barrier and contributing to student alienation.

Students from both non-fee and fee-paying schooling backgrounds, stressed the importance of language when it comes to decolonizing the curriculum. In relation to this topic, students from both schooling backgrounds highlighted language barriers, which contributes to a fear of judgment, lack of content engagement, an overall hinders students' participation. The challenges faced by students reflect broader issues within the South African education system, suggesting a lack of responsiveness to diverse student populations. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the decolonization of higher education and the curriculum in South Africa.

What can be seen from the reviewed literature was that different scholars have quite varied definitions and perspectives not only on what the term decolonization means, but also what decolonizing the curriculum would entail. The perspectives of students on decolonization revealed that they also have different ways of understanding what decolonization in relation to the curriculum means to them. Three key elements were identified from the data, these being that these students defined decolonization as being concerned with the process of learning and unlearning, systemic change, and the Africanization or Indigenization of the curriculum.

The first view is that decolonization is process of unlearning. This unlearning involves critically examining and challenging established knowledge paradigms which are rooted in colonial ideologies. The students who spoke about unlearning recognize the dominance of western knowledge and Eurocentric ideologies, which is why they argue that there is a need to shift the focus more African-centred content within academia, and to question ingrained biases and preconceived notions inherited from colonial legacies. For these students, decolonization is about challenging the status quo and actively engaging with diverse viewpoints especially those from the African perspective.

There were also students who believe that to decolonize involves systemic transformation. From this perspective, there needs to be a thorough reorganization of all current structures, organizations, and procedures that could help in perpetuating colonial legacies. In this view it is necessary to thoroughly review the curriculum, teaching practices and institutional regulations. A few key themes which emerged from these students' perspective was that there

is a need to resolve power disparities, dismantle systems of oppression and a acknowledge the necessity of fair representation and involvement of previously marginalized groups.

Students who define decolonization of the curriculum as involving Africanization or Indigenization point to a desire to have a curriculum which not only reflected the context in which they lived, but also one which reflects the richness and complexity of their cultural backgrounds. These students challenge the historically imposed norms that have marginalized non-European worldviews. They advocate for a curriculum that is inclusive of African voices, literature, furthermore they expressed that lecturers need to come from diverse backgrounds and to include more people who looked like "them" [Africans]. Students who hold this view believe that there needs to be a move away from Eurocentric ways of knowing and teaching in order to find ways of teaching that incorporate African or Indigenous knowledge, histories, and cultural elements into the learning environment. What can be observed from some of the students' answers regarding their perception of decolonization is that their views are rooted in a West/Global North vs Africa perspective. In their view, the key issue when it comes to decolonization is the need to address the relationship between the Global North/West and the African continent. This raises questions about the representation of the Global South beyond Africa in this discourse.

In some responses, there is a notable absence of reference to the diverse perspectives and experiences within regions outside South Africa or the African continent. This is evident in how some respondents suggest that decolonization, for them, entails focusing on localizing educational materials, prioritizing South African content over that from the Global North. This indicates a narrower view of decolonization, limited to localized contexts, without considering the broader spectrum of experiences across the entire continent or the Global South.

In summary, the interviewed students had diverse view on their definitions of decolonization. Their views reflect a holistic approach to transformative change in higher education. The emphasis on Africanization or Indigenization highlights the importance of cultural diversity, curriculum responsiveness, representation, and challenging the hegemony of Eurocentrism. Students who argue that decolonization requires systemic change were calling for dismantling of systems which perpetuate the legacy of colonialism as well as the reconfiguration of institutional structures in order to create an environment in which all cultural contributions are valued and respected. Students who highlighted unlearning as a crucial step in the

decolonization process signify their conscious effort to break free from the shackles of colonization in order to embracing more inclusive ways of knowledge production. These students highlight the importance of questioning the dominance of western knowledge and ways of knowing and teaching.

The views of these students advocate for various dimensions of decolonization. Their views contribute to a broader discourse of decolonizing higher education which seeks to find ways in which education can become a space in which all voices, views, cultures, and theories are brough to the center on equal footing. The perspectives of these students highlight the urgency of acknowledging historical injustices, empowering marginalized communities, and fostering a collective commitment to building a future that is reflective of the diverse nature of human experiences.

After gaining an understanding of how students understood the concept of decolonization, the second part of this discussion was focused on whether or not these students feel that the departments with which they interact are decolonized. In this theme, the students were grouped into three groups, those that feel that their department(s) is/are decolonized, those who feel that their department(s) is/are trying to decolonize and those who did not believe that their department(s) is/are decolonized. The reasons they provide for their views help us better understand what they mean by decolonization.

Some of the students highlight departmental level positives which led them to believe that their departments and curriculum were decolonized. The first was what these students view as a departure from a rigid, linear syllabus and moving towards one which encourages the exploration of diverse historical perspectives. The use of the term “our [African] history” suggests a connection and identification with the content being taught, highlighting a sense of inclusivity. The second point raised by students in this regard was that a decolonized space is one in which there is the existence of a broader space for Africanness, indicating that there is room for diverse influences and perspectives within the department. These students react positively to this, highlighting that the ability to bring their own ways of thinking and doing things into the department was important, instead of strictly adhering to predefined standards set by others, in particular standards which are reflective of western influence and dominance in various aspects of African society such as education.

Students who believe that their departments were trying to decolonize, argue that some positive steps had been taken to decolonize, however, they feel that more is needed for them to be fully convinced that decolonization had taken place. One of these students defines decolonization as an active process involving changes such as incorporating African histories, eliminating sub-human classifications, and encouraging the use of native languages. They emphasize that decolonization doesn't have a specific look but requires continuous interrogation of the curriculum. Another student was sceptical that their department was decolonized. The reason for their hesitance was because of the focus on "old white men" in their studies, suggesting that remnants of coloniality persist in academic content. One student describes their department as "trying" to decolonize, indicating room for improvement. Another student appreciates the inclusion of languages other than English but cautiously considers the department as decolonized "to a certain extent", implying the need for further measures. These perspectives highlight the multifaceted nature of decolonization; while the students recognized the progress made, they also argue that there were some ongoing challenges and the need for continued efforts towards inclusivity and diversity in academic spaces, which might lead them to believe that these spaces have become decolonized.

The last group of students were those who do not believe their departments are decolonized. The students cited various reasons for holding this perspective. The key points that were raised pertained to a lack of lecturer diversity, an overreliance on Western literature which places African knowledge to the sidelines and a failure to move beyond a Eurocentric curriculum. These students argue that they would like inclusivity in which there is a more diversity in their departments. Some students urge for the facilitation of a space in which varied perspectives could be heard on equal footing, a balanced representation of global knowledge, and a departure from traditional Western-centric learning approaches. The key argument from these students is that to decolonize their departments, there is a need to emphasize cultural sensitivity and the incorporation of diverse voices in order to create a more inclusive and representative academic environment.

This study provides some preliminary insights into how students in the Humanities Faculty at Rhodes University understand and experience decolonization. The study focused only on a small number of students in one faculty at one university. Further studies incorporating more students, lectures and universities could provide contributions towards, the ongoing discussions around how we can decolonize the curriculum and higher education. Another

recommendation would be a study that is focused on how better to assist students, from non-English home language backgrounds adjust to university experience, focusing on language barriers and epistemological access.

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