A Conceptual Analysis of What it Means to Decolonize the Curriculum

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Abstract. The concept of decoloniality has been subject to wide-ranging debates among academics and students alike. These discussions have often looked at the issue from a subjective stance, narrowing its meaning down to interpretation based on individuals' backgrounds and contexts. Consequently, the understanding of decoloniality as it relates to university curricula has remained fragmented, leading to inconsistencies in how it is put into practice. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by unpacking the conceptual ambiguity surrounding what it means to decolonize the curricula in university classrooms. Hence, this study intends to deconstruct the decoloniality of the curriculum as it relates to the pedagogical disposition of the classroom in universities using decolonial theory as the basis of argument. The study answers questions about the assumptions of decoloniality suitable to understand the decoloniality of the curriculum. This conceptual analysis is located within a transformative worldview as a lens and employs conceptual analysis as a tool to make sense of the argument deductively from the decolonial premises. The study argues that decolonizing the curriculum is beyond any personal, contextual, historical, and environmental subjectification, and should instead be viewed as advocacy to challenge existing power dynamics towards incorporating traditionally overlooked or excluded ways of doing. Therefore, it is essential to understand "decolonizing the curriculum" from the process of knowing, empowering the disempowered, self-determination, and an anti-oppressive perspective.

Keywords: conceptual analysis; curriculum; decoloniality; decolonizing the curriculum; transformative worldview

1. Introduction

Decoloniality has become an increasingly prominent concept for academics and students, who have examined it in depth regarding its implications for diverse sociocultural landscapes. This has stimulated vibrant dialogue about the impact of unequal power dynamics by exploring mechanisms such as those associated with colonization and imperialism that constrain the ability of an array of people to shape their own future. Discourses around decoloniality demand, perhaps more than anything else, a systematic examination of how colonial structures can

be made visible so they can be disrupted appropriately (Sauerbronn et al., 2021; Sium et al., 2012). However, critics have criticized decolonial writers as failing to fully understand their circumstances and as engaging in simplistic writing without sufficient understanding of context or nuance (Dunlap, 2022; Martínez-Novo, 2018; McDowall & Ramos, 2018). Nonetheless, it remains important to understand that decoloniality is not merely a topic for theoretical discourse but has important implications for real-world social movements seeking to create lasting change (Deem, 2019). Therefore, these debates not only uncover existing systems that act as impediments to liberation but also give voice to alternative forms of knowledge production grounded in indigenous thinking and local practices (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014).

While this decolonial worldview offers an undeniably useful source of discursive material and ideas, it is essential to recognize the subjective nature of its application (de França Sá & Marsico, 2022). This is because the accomplishments brought about by the said discussions or the scholars of it are not always applicable in each context or based on individuals' backgrounds. As such, interpretations of the same subject matter may vary profoundly despite originating from the same perspective. Therefore, a better understanding of its reach and implementation can be achieved by paying attention to how subjective viewpoints can affect meaning-making.

The lack of consensus among theorists and academics regarding the concept of decoloniality has propagated a deep-rooted divide in how it is implemented in university curricula. This has led to distorted interpretations of decoloniality, obscuring its true purpose and creating conflicting ideas of its role within the academic context. As a result, ambiguity persists, while universities struggle to define and implement meaningful strategies for deconstructing power relations between different knowledge systems and pedagogies. We noticed a considerable disinterest or lack of knowledge among university students, lecturers, and other scholars when it comes to an understanding of a decolonized curriculum, decolonized university classrooms, and the implications of decoloniality in higher education. As such, this study is motivated to develop a comprehensive understanding of these concepts and facilitate better critical inquiry and thought about the ways in which power structures within universities can become more equitable for all. It is hoped that through careful consideration of these ideas, light may be shed on the far-reaching effects of colonial legacies (Maseland, 2018) found in modern education systems.

Therefore, in order to rectify these discrepancies, there is an urgent need to conceptually deconstruct the foundations of decoloniality from the ground up. By doing so, it would be possible for the targeted audience, such as students, lecturers, and academics, to understand the values at the core of decoloniality on a greater level and bring about more substantial change towards achieving a truly clear knowledge curriculum and classroom practices within the principles of decoloniality. Hence, this study intends to deconstruct the decoloniality of the curriculum (decolonizing the curriculum) as it relates to the classroom pedagogical disposition using decolonial theory as the basis of argument.

2. Research Questions

Based on the above problem, the following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What is decoloniality?
- What are the assumptions of decoloniality capable of defining "decolonizing the curriculum"?

3. Methodology

This conceptual paper is located within the transformative paradigm. Given the current ambiguity in the decolonization of the curriculum as a concept, it is necessary to deconstruct the concept. Therefore, this conceptual paper is lensed within the transformative worldview, allowing us to unpack and examine the potential of decoloniality vis-à-vis its correlational tendencies with university classrooms. This paradigmatic approach is particularly appropriate for evaluating this phenomenon given its capabilities of providing a critical analysis of current conditions and suggesting innovative solutions that are inspired by an alternative standpoint from which to pursue meaningful reform (Carangio, 2021; Mertens, 2007, 2010). Since higher education institutions are one of the entities that is uniquely positioned to initiate transformative empowerment that empowers individuals, including students, academics, and lecturers, this paper therefore contributes to transformative discourse in academic literature. By changing the existing situation in ways that broaden perspectives and encourage growth in knowledge, attitudes, and skills across multiple aspects of life, academic communities achieve deeper levels of understanding which support an ever-evolving capacity to live more sustainably. Such transformations can lead to meaningful academic research, civic engagement, and an increase in opportunities for the academic community.

Conceptual analysis was employed as a tool to make sense of the argument deductively from the decolonial premises. Conceptual analysis is a well-suited tool for deductive argumentation due to its ability to precisely identify important concepts specific to the required evidence (Furner, 2004; Valchev, 2018). When dealing with an argument, conceptual analysis can be used to parse out key terms (von Colln-Appling & Giuliano, 2017), as well as to critically examine the underlying assumptions of each claim that is made. This offers the resource of evidence from which meaningful conclusions can be drawn. Additionally, conceptual analysis helps to depict a more precise meaning behind a statement by making subtle distinctions that may have been overlooked (Valchev, 2018; von Colln-Appling & Giuliano, 2017). Ultimately, though, this precise identification makes it particularly suitable for studying the strength of logical arguments through rigorous scrutiny and comparison. In this study, decoloniality concept is presented, within which its assumptions are argued alongside its relationships with the decoloniality of the curriculum and university classroom practices.

To start with, the concept of decoloniality is unpacked, and its assumptions vis-à-vis their relationship with the curriculum towards understanding the term *decolonized curriculum* or *decoloniality of the curriculum* are presented.

4. Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the concept of decoloniality, its assumptions, and how they can be explored to clarify what it means to "decolonize the curriculum".

4.1 Decoloniality as a Concept

Decoloniality is an academic, political, and social movement that emerged to provide an alternative to both colonial structures of power and post-colonialism, mostly linked to Latin America (Lentin, 2021) but with growing acceptance from around the world. It focuses on challenging the dominant Western European colonizer-imperialist narrative which has dominated for centuries and aims to empower oppressed people worldwide by legitimizing their knowledge, languages, and cultures (Kerr, 2014; Manning, 2018). The aim of decoloniality is to help create a more equitable relationship between colonizers and those previously colonized, working towards a more just society in terms of politics, socioeconomics, and culture (Shizha, 2010). Crucially, it seeks justice through not only undoing but also decolonizing cultural categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality – which are often deeply embedded in power structures (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015a, 2015b; Schiwy, 2007). Consequently, one can argue that decoloniality works beyond understanding history mainly as a struggle between conquerors and conquered; using a critical lens, this framework shifts to how we should respond to colonialism while looking at past circumstances within today's context so as to work towards meaningful transformation.

From the perspectives of Moyo and Mutsvairo (2018) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019), decoloniality brings forth a counter-hegemonic framework of categorization and understanding the complexities of modern society. The framework questions how knowledge is constructed not only through systems of colonialism but also within different communities and social groups which have suffered from centuries of underrepresentation. That is, by emphasizing the importance of self-determination for individuals, decoloniality puts the agency in the hands of people who have been traditionally excluded from different societies, changing oppressive power dynamics in education and collective understanding.

Although decoloniality is often understood as being related to decolonization, the two terms are not synonymous. While decoloniality shares some common traits with decolonization, namely rejecting hierarchies of power structures based on imperialism or colonization, it is not to be confused as synonymous. That is, decolonization pertains to past processes or struggle for liberation from the colonizer's political grip (Omanga, 2020), whereas decoloniality opens up further avenues for post-colonial thought and action through an analytical approach that centers anti-oppressive narrative practices (Trisos et al., 2021). Central to the concept of decoloniality is the emphasis on understanding how systems embedded in colonial knowledge produce inequality. However, decoloniality recognizes that current power dynamics enabled by imperial and colonial forces whose distortions remain visible today in global culture, economics, politics, and education signify a proactive stance towards reorienting established knowledge production methods and disrupting colonial forms of oppression at all levels.

Based on the above, one can argue that decoloniality challenges Euro- or Americentric epistemology and seeks a decolonized knowledge in discourse. This knowledge can be created through reclaiming or revitalizing indigenous knowledge and by considering how Western education may be oppressive or Eurocentric (Bergström, 2021), for example the concept of settler colonialism. In practical terms, decoloniality may guide, for instance, the selection of literature on school reading lists; it might also inform more principal aspects of curriculum design, such as student-centered learning. Ultimately, decoloniality strives to re-orient spaces of education around polyvocal perspectives, which include narratives from various sources representing different identities. This is an indication that decoloniality is a movement that cuts across all sectors, including education, which justifies the need to decolonize the curriculum in university spaces. Such endeavor involves a critical analysis of courses, instructional materials, methodological approaches, and assessment tools that reflect the values of all learning communities, free from oppressive narratives, intolerant beliefs, and politics of hate.

4.2 Assumptions of Decoloniality Concept
From the above presentation of the decolonial concept, the following assumptions were deduced as some of the features of decoloniality that will be considered in this study. That is, decoloniality advocates challenging the process of knowing, empowering the disempowered, and preaching for self-determination, and is anti-oppressive in nature. These four assumptions are discussed below.

4.2.1 Challenging the process of knowing
From the above concept of decoloniality, it was deduced that decoloniality is a form of resistance which seeks to confront and disrupt the domination of knowledge systems based on Euro- or Americentric power. It works to challenge epistemology, the processes and theories through which people gain knowledge about the world (Keet, 2014; Mitova, 2020). Controlling the kind of knowledge imposed by Westerners for centuries creates new spaces for exploration and recognition of inherent diversity and plurality in how knowledge is produced, accessed, and acted upon (Mignolo, 2012). Decoloniality not only questions existing epistemologies but also offers innovative roads that create more equitable knowledge production, proving ground-breaking value to our understanding of issues of power, knowledge, and liberation in a global context (Kubota, 2022).

Challenging the colonial way of knowing provides an inclusive opportunity for people to become part of the knowledge production process and opens up possibilities to build dynamic spaces for intellectual inquiry never before grasped (Fellner, 2018). Therefore, through decolonial frameworks, we can engage in a discourse that interrogates thoughts, enhances understanding of how power systems create knowledge in an oppressive manner, and reveals how these systems can be challenged or re-ordered. In this way, decoloniality is important not only in its ability to challenge epistemology and the process of knowing but also to construct an environment where ordinary people are not limited by those who dictate.

4.2.2 Empowering the disempowered

Decoloniality is a movement that aims to disrupt the systems of colonialism in place by empowering and liberating those who have been subjugated by it throughout history (Mays, 2019). This is achieved by recognizing and challenging the oppressive, colonial power structures that exist, both on the macro-level, such as dominant civilizations and nations, and on the micro-level, such as within educational curricula or other aspects of everyday life. In bringing attention to these structures, decoloniality seeks to create an environment wherein efforts can be made to restore agency and dignity to these communities which have been deprived for so long. Ultimately, this serves to promote equity and justice among all peoples regardless of prior uneven distributions of power due to the influence of colonial structures (Garcia, 2018).

Based on this argument, one can view decoloniality from a theoretical level, where it examines the power structures of colonialism, which shaped the current socio-political landscape and advocates for resisting and overturning these embedded unequal systems. In practice, on the other hand, decoloniality foregrounds the voices of people who have traditionally been excluded from the "mainstream" narrative – striving towards an equitable society where all individuals are empowered regardless of their background. This is achieved through initiatives such as educationally re-centering indigenous knowledge, creating opportunities through, for example, job training programs and mentoring schemes, and expanding access to resources. Ultimately, decoloniality works to build a more equitable future by righting both past and present injustices, through which those who have been disempowered can gain liberation from unjust structural forces in society.

4.2.3 Respecting self-determination

From the above presentation of decoloniality concept, one can deduce that decoloniality is a burgeoning movement of self-determination that foregrounds the need for the liberation of marginalized communities across the world. This emancipatory philosophy is grounded in the principle of self-reflection and historical reparation, divorced from preconceived notions about progress or advancement imposed by colonial powers. Its purpose is to assert political agency, overcome disenfranchisement, abolish unequal power structures, create autonomous forms of knowledge production, and engender conversations about relationality to build a more equitable society (Harms-Smith & Rasool, 2020). This also justifies that decoloniality holds tremendous possibilities not only for emerging nations and their citizens but also for those living within established nation-states. Recognizing the systemic dynamics that keep certain populations subjugated is the first step needed to contest this state of affairs and actively work towards a form of collective liberation.

In clear terms, decoloniality is a critical tool that champions autonomy, self-governance, and self-determination for individuals and communities. Through this assumption, people tend to confront the legacies of systemic exploitation in order to enact positive change. By identifying and critically analyzing the oppressive structures that uphold unequal power dynamics, decolonial movements are able to devise creative strategies for establishing equitable

societies (Agboka, 2014). However, it is an approach rooted in solidarity and collective action: working together for the greater good.

4.2.4 Anti-oppressive in nature
Based on the above conceptual presentation, one can deduce that decoloniality is a form of resistance against oppression and domination in the current world. It seeks to undo the structure of power that often exists within different forms of hegemony (Naidu, 2021), such as classism, racism, and sexism. By rejecting imperial domination and its legacies, decolonizing practices can be seen to undermine systems of power in favor of creating more equitable institutions and societies (Auerbach, 2021; Saurombe, 2018). Therefore, decoloniality values plurality, diversity, and autonomy in order to de-emphasize oppressive forms of knowledge while uplifting subjugated identities. Thus, it can be argued that decoloniality works towards creating contexts where oppressive conditions are confronted and equality is established in conceptualization, theories, practice, and praxis.

In the practical sense, this means that this results in the acceptance or recognition of voices typically excluded from mainstream discourse, as well as in an appreciation for cultures previously dismissed by the oppressive system within which they exist. In our argument, this is an attempt to provide power to those affected by the oppression produced by colonialism, ultimately resulting in the disruption of oppressive and hierarchical systems which prioritize certain people while denigrating others. Structural racism, capitalism, patriarchy, and other forms of systemic inequality are rendered amenable to change when anti-oppressive principles of decoloniality are embraced.

4.3 Nexus Between the Assumptions and "Decolonizing the Curriculum"
This section presents the relationship between the assumptions of decoloniality concept and the understanding of the concept of decolonizing the curriculum or decoloniality of the curriculum. This is done with cognizance of the assumptions as it correlates with the understanding of decolonizing the curriculum. They are: challenging the process of knowing and the understanding of decolonizing the curriculum, empowering the disempowered and the understanding of decolonizing the curriculum, self-determination and the understanding of decolonizing the curriculum, and anti-oppression and the understanding of decolonizing the curriculum.

4.3.1 Challenging the process of knowing and decolonizing the curriculum
In order to understand the concept of decolonizing the curriculum, the assumption of decoloniality that talks about challenging the process of knowing needs to be envisioned because it explains how the curriculum should be challenged. This means that decolonizing the curriculum involves interrogating how knowledge has been constructed within an academic context, with a particular focus on the persistent colonial power structures that continue to shape education spaces. This interrogation demands the definers to consider the assumption of decoloniality – that is, critically reflecting on how we come to know what we do. By being attuned to these dynamics, students may be provided with

alternatives critiquing oppressive curricula and replacing them with pedagogies more appropriate for enabling decolonial thinking and action. This calls for noting the multi-layered and complex nature of decolonization and its implications for teaching, learning, and assessment practices in education today.

At its heart, the concept of decoloniality outlines a process of revisioning: How can we reimagine the curriculum to reflect a more holistic, equitable perspective? To understand this process of revisioning, it is necessary to unpack concepts such as post-colonialism; the importance of power structures within knowledge production; decolonial literacy; and self-reflexivity. From here, educators can begin to move away from existing colonial frameworks in order to produce knowledge that better empowers communities. This, then, helps to create a vibrant explanation of what it means to decolonize the curriculum and knowledge production perspective.

4.3.2 Empowering the disempowered and decolonizing the curriculum
In order to understand the concept of decolonizing the curriculum, the assumption of decoloniality that talks about the fact that the curriculum should be tailored towards empowering the students and creating equal opportunities for students is fundamental. That is, decolonization of the curriculum is a kind of social and knowledge empowerment for disempowered students at any educational level. This involves tailoring curricula to empower students, create equal opportunities, and foster inclusion within learning environments. This approach seeks to break through longstanding power systems that have rendered certain demographics disempowered and unequal in terms of their access to knowledge and educational resources. By actively decolonizing a curriculum, institutions tend to create meaningful learning experiences while mitigating longstanding inequities that have plagued learning environments. As such, it is a concept that warrants further research and consideration as it has significant implications for student engagement and educational outcomes.

Therefore, a decolonized curriculum is one that can promote social justice and combat exclusion by providing genuine support from various aspects to replace systems of inequity. Hence, decolonizing the curriculum enables equal opportunities for every student regardless of race, class, and gender by giving them more control over their learning experiences. The argument of Trout et al. (2018) also supports our argument that decoloniality fundamentally addresses power differentials within knowledge production. This contributes towards an ultimately equitable environment – where each student is allowed to gain valuable skills and knowledge without any kind of academic negation or disadvantage.

4.3.3 Self-determination and decolonizing the curriculum
To understand the concept of decolonizing the curriculum, the assumption of decoloniality that talks about self-determination upholds that students should be provided an opportunity to participate in the process of curriculum development for the purpose of inclusivity and informed knowledge production in university classrooms. That is, self-determination emerges as a central concept in this process, stressing the importance of allowing students to actively participate in

developing curricula that reflect their perspectives. In this way, university classrooms become more conscious of systemic power dynamics within higher education institutions, offering a meaningful opportunity for informed knowledge production. Ultimately, decolonizing the curriculum involves dismantling colonial ideas and privileging indigenous ways of knowing through self-determination (Harvey & Russell-Mundine, 2019). It is up to the curriculum stakeholders to develop this capacity among teachers/lecturers and students alike to ensure the success of decolonial ideologies within academic settings. Hence, such an approach actively seeks to increase inclusivity and encourages consideration of different cultural views. Recognizing these collective experiences allows for more meaningful connections between communities and universities, thereby producing an enhanced learning experience for all stakeholders. By doing this, one must have the principle of self-determination in mind when conceptualizing or ruminating on what it means to decolonize the curriculum.

4.3.4 Anti-oppression and decolonizing the curriculum

The assumption of decoloniality that talks about anti-oppression is fundamental to the understanding of decolonizing the curriculum. That is, a decolonized curriculum is devoid of any form of oppression, be it systemic or power politics. This entails eradicating any form of hierarchy, power dynamics, and cultural hegemony from curricula to ensure the perspectives of those who have been historically oppressed are given priority in education. A decolonized curriculum must be built on a foundation entailing principles such as inclusion and equality for all people regardless of racial makeup, gender identity, and socioeconomic status. If educators move away from upholding oppressive attitudes and instead embrace everyone in the learning environment from diverse backgrounds with an open heart, then collectively decolonizing curricula can effectively reshape society's educational structures.

Therefore, a decolonized curriculum is one that prioritizes the elimination of all oppressive structures in classrooms. To achieve this goal, a central concept is that of decoloniality, which challenges oppressive power dynamics (Onafuwa, 2018). This indicates that decolonizing the curriculum is beyond simply reducing the influence of dominant ideologies and instead seeking to genuinely rework educational systems to proactively recognize diverse narratives and experiences of oppression. In doing this, universities create an equitable learning environment where everyone is afforded their basic human rights and dignity.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study provided an answer to the two research questions on decoloniality of the curriculum and how its assumptions can contribute to a clear understanding of what it means to decolonize the curriculum. By answering these questions, arguments exist that assumptions such as challenging the process of knowing, empowering the disempowered, self-determination, and anti-oppressive tendencies of decoloniality are the dimensions that can bring more clarity to the concept of decolonizing the curriculum. In other words, to gain deeper insights into this issue, one must examine the arguments around it from a variety of angles. These angles were broken down above into multiple facets to reach

decolonization – challenging existing ways of knowing, emphasizing self-determination and anti-oppression initiatives, while also providing an avenue for the disempowered to regain their agency over their own affairs. Thus, these arguments exist to provide more concrete guidelines within broader standards that objectives must meet in order to claim their status as "decolonial" curricula. Through this lens, we can gain further clarity on what it means to leave behind the legacy of colonialist systems and instead embrace a new era built with empowered and knowledge-rich communities at its center.

Based on this, the following recommendation was made. When attempting to conceptualize decolonizing the curriculum, students, lecturers, and academics should be cognizant of several key values: challenging the process of knowing and questioning what is being taught, empowering the disempowered by representing diverse cultures in the syllabus, recognizing and respecting self-determination, and enacting an anti-oppressive approach. These values transform the longstanding ambiguity of decoloniality of the curriculum.

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